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FILMS: FACTS AND FORECASTS



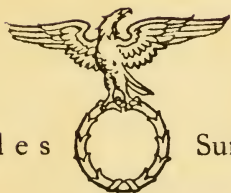
CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND THE AUTHOR.

Frontispiece.

FILMS

FACTS AND FORECASTS

BY
L'ESTRANGE FAWCETT



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Suffolk St., Pall Mall

Printed in Great Britain

FOREWORD

THE motion picture, by its very essence as a visual art, is as universal as sight itself. Because it is recognised by all peoples, the figure of Man in its many phases and aspects should be the sole subject-matter of cinema plays, made in whatever country the accidents of life may have placed the creative artists.

Mr. Fawcett's pages, read in manuscript here in New York City, reveal his full comprehension of this highly essential point at the outset of his approach to appraisal of the cinema in its larger meanings. Further, his words disclose a genuine sympathy for the art of the motion picture and a wholesome concern for the ultimate establishment of the film-industry on a basis of sound values.

The people who have devoted their lives to development of the cinema could not possibly have been held to the virtual slavery of their self-imposed tasks by the love of gold alone. Long ago they had amassed sufficient wealth to sustain them in mutton and ale the rest of their natural lives. There must have been, must be, a fascination that radiates from the magic of celluloid, arousing the amateur spirit in men and women comprised in their totality so largely of a sector that admits itself with disarming frankness to be wholly commercial in objective.

It has been from the film itself, a device offering constant provocation to the imagination and senses of rhythm and colour, that the sheer strength and crude grandeur of the motion-picture industry have come.

A giant of limitless power has been reared, so huge that no one quite knows what to do with it.

I, for one, am hopeful that Mr. H. G. Wells shall settle the question for us in his next novel !

Mr. Fawcett is to be commended. He is the first writer on the ills of the cinema (as they are termed) who has not offered in a single sentence a bromidic cure-all. He does not speak *ex cathedra*. He is not ensconced on Olympus, and from that eminence tossing off to us humble artisans ukases without number, as nimbly and as rapidly as one of Mr. Eugene O'Neill's unusually able seamen might toss off mugs of grog.

In this sane attitude Mr. Fawcett is eminently profound. For there can be, now, no complete diagnosis of the cinema's growing-pains, no effective prescription guaranteed to make the motion picture as healthy as a eugenic infant. The present state of flux precludes the advisability of any comment not merely that of an observer who sets forth dispassionately certain facts and leaves conclusions to be deduced therefrom to his readers.

The ensuing pages seem to one in the profession lucid at all times. They possess a fluidity of phrasing that makes them good reading. Yet it is because their author has seen and heard himself the facts which he records that I hold his document to be deserving of respectful and serious consideration by thoughtful students of the cinema in its relation alike to the public mind, high finance, and modern art.

Charles Maxwell

NEW YORK CITY,

August 12, 1927.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I WISH to express my gratitude for the most kindly consideration and help which I have received from individuals inside the trade. Chief among them is Mr. Marcus Loew, of Loew Incorporated and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures, one of the *doyens* of the American business, without whose co-operation, encouragement, and friendliness in giving exceptional facilities I should never have dared to set down any account of the film in America.

Most of the photographs are reproduced by the courtesy of one or other of the following film organisations: Paramount Famous-Lasky Film Corporation, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, First National, United Artists, Charles Chaplin Film Corporation, the Gaumont Company, Universum Film A.G. and Sovkino.

I also received much help from Sir William Jury, Mr. A. George Smith (of the London office of Producers' Distributing Corporation), Mr. Walter Wanger (of the Paramount Famous-Lasky headquarters in New York), Dr. Becker (head of the foreign department of Universum Film A.G. in Berlin), Mr. Fellner (of Messrs. Fellner and Sonito, Berlin), and Mr. E. W. Fredman, who was kind enough to read my proofs.

Just after the proofs of this book had been finally corrected I received the sad news of the death of Mr. Marcus Loew at his Long Island home on September 5, 1927. I should like to take this opportunity of expressing my sympathy to his family and his numberless friends and admirers, and of saying how keenly I miss the privilege of inviting his able criticism of these pages.

L'E. F.

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FILMS: FACTS AND FORECASTS

CHAPTER I

HISTORY AND FUTURE OF THE FILM

THE film has enemies who treat it with contempt, and it has friends whose adulation make it too confident of its gilt-edged security. The object of this book is neither to praise nor blame the film, but to examine some aspects of it, indicating its present weakness and strength, and describing some of its business and technical processes. The book hopes to expose some fallacies, explode some theories and propound others, and study the film critically and sympathetically.

It will concentrate largely on the American end of the business.

Space will be devoted to examining the attitude of the trade to the film, a point of view not often aired in public—first, because it is only expressed in trade journals, which the public do not read; and, secondly, and more important, because the trade in Great Britain has never made any attempt to express its opinion on any subject with a corporate and authoritative voice.

The English public, generally, believes that the trade consists of a heterogeneous collection of men and women, some of whom live debauched lives in a distant sunny clime, others who lure innocent children into garish buildings and pollute their minds with filthy, foreign trash, and a few super-wealthy people, mostly Americans with continental names, who “wanna go

on record," viâ newspaper reporters in Savoy Hotel suites, that they just love this little old London-town, but that the fog sure is terrible.

Well, of course, there is something more in film-making and film-showing than that. The present century and the film are about the same age, and there is certainly no mechanical invention that has ever made more rapid strides in twenty-seven years than the film. The half has not been told of its potential wonders—sound films, television films, wireless films, perfect colour films, stereoscopic films, non-inflammable films, modifications in the projection of films, which today have to be jerked sixteen times a second through the beam of light in order to create the illusion of movement on the screen—all such developments have or will come, and the field for experiment and invention is immense.

Every film-man in Hollywood, Paris, Berlin or London will tell you that daily, hourly, changes are taking place in the direction of the acting; the writing of scenario, story, treatment and sub-titles; the choice of material and musical accompaniment; the planning of picture-theatres; and the modes of world-wide distribution of the pictures. The whole film-universe is in a perpetual state of flux, and, no doubt before this book is printed, much of it will be out of date.

There are no less self-satisfied people in the world than film-folk. The commercial urge is so powerful and the competition of rivals so keen, that they cannot stand still a moment. As a result, they do not permit themselves enough quiet thinking and patient meditation. They rush into production and turn out miles of immature film, which brings the whole thing—industry, art, business, call it what you will—into disrepute. What, I believe, the industry needs most,

is time to set its house in order, and upset the calculations of exasperating people who pour contempt on every new method of self-expression.

The first phase of the film's history is concerned with its technical development. A hundred years ago the idea of moving pictures had been considered as a possibility by scientists, but it was not until the Eighties that the subject was taken up with intensity. The film, of course, was not invented at all, although the American courts laid it down in 1912 that Edison was entitled to the full credit. The film was evolved bit by bit in various countries. Friese-Green was exhibiting his cinematograph camera in London in 1885. At the same time Dr. Marey was achieving remarkable results in Paris by photographing movement on an ordinary plate, and Edison was at work on his camera and on his kinetoscope, a penny-in-the-slot peep-show, into which one could look and see something like a modern film passing across one's line of vision.

All these inventors were held up by the need for a malleable substance which should take the place of the photographic plate, and it was not until 1889 that Eastman and Walker, working on suggestions that had been made in almost every country in the world, evolved the first really practical strip of sensitised celluloid film. That was at Rochester, New York, where most of the world's film is still made, and the first of the inventors to see the value of the new substance was the nearest—Edison. It was just the material he needed for his peep-show, and four years later the exhibition at the Chicago World Fair of the completed kinetoscope had far-reaching effects.

Edison achieved the illusion he wanted. A man could look through the peep-hole and see moving pictures. But that was a long distance from the modern

picture-theatre, where 5,000 people at once can see the film. The next stage in the evolution of the film was carried out in Hatton Garden, London, where Robert W. Paul, by adapting Edison's device, conceived the idea of throwing the film on a screen.

Paul did more. He realised the need for an intermittent movement in both his camera and his projector. Every little picture in the film must be held stationary for a fraction of a second so as to register an individual impression on the screen, and every one of the snapshots constituting the film in the camera must be taken separately. The present rate of exposure of the little pictures that make up the film is sixteen a second. Other inventors in America, Armat especially, were working on the principle, but Paul was the first actually to project satisfactorily a moving picture on the screen. That was in 1895, and being a man of foresight and intelligence he quickly turned the discovery to commercial advantage. There must be many still who remember his sensational theatrograph, exhibited at Olympia and the Alhambra in 1896.

The Lumière Brothers in Paris, also using the kinetoscope as a model, evolved their cinematographic machine about the same time, and by sending it to New York without delay, were literally responsible for the start of the American film-business. Everyone wanted to buy either a Paul or a Lumière machine, and Paul worked so swiftly, turning out both the projector and the films, that, for a time, the British output was supreme.

In the second phase of the film's development the evolution of the film-story begins. In the early days the producer was content to photograph topical events, horse-races, boxing-matches, and so on. No one attempted to stage a film-play, though Paul as early as

1896 produced on the roof of the Alhambra Theatre a semi-fictional film, entitled "The Soldier's Courtship," 40 feet in length. Few films were longer than that. "The Passion Play," produced by Hollaman in New York in 1897-98, which was about 2,000 feet in length, was the most ambitious effort of the day, but it hardly ranks as fiction, for the scenes were copied from the Oberammergau play.

Cecil Hepworth in London had made one or two little fiction subjects—"Rescued by Rover" was one—but they had not been regarded as pointing the way to a new film style, and the early days of the century saw the film in America sinking into disrepute, because the public were getting tired of the topicals. The era of the film-play is usually said to have opened (why, I am not quite sure) with the production in 1903 of "The Great Train Robbery" by a couple of Edison's lieutenants. It was 800 feet long, took ten or twelve minutes to show, and created a furore in America. Miss Mae Murray was the principal actress, appearing in a dance-hall scene.

"The Great Train Robbery" inaugurated the era of the popular one-reeler, which meant that the average length of a film had been increased from 40 to 1,000 feet, and the one-reeler ruled supreme for eight or nine years before anyone thought seriously of producing a film which, by taking an hour or more to show, would compete with the appeal of a play. The one-reeler, which varied in length from 800 to 2,000 feet, corresponded roughly to a music-hall turn, and could be easily incorporated in a vaudeville programme. But it went on to call for establishments of its own, where it would be the principal attraction. In Europe for many years the film continued to be shown in music-halls, but in America its popularity gave rise to that

peculiar institution, the "nickelodeon," or the little picture-theatre, for which the charge for admission was a nickel, and to which attention was directed by a screeching phonograph. Any old room did for a nickelodeon, but gradually the penny arcades, where once the slot-machines had reigned, were turned over to the new-fangled pictures. Almost all the present heads of the film-business in America—Adolph Zukor, Marcus Loew, William Fox, and Carl Laemmle among them—ran and made money out of the nickelodeon.

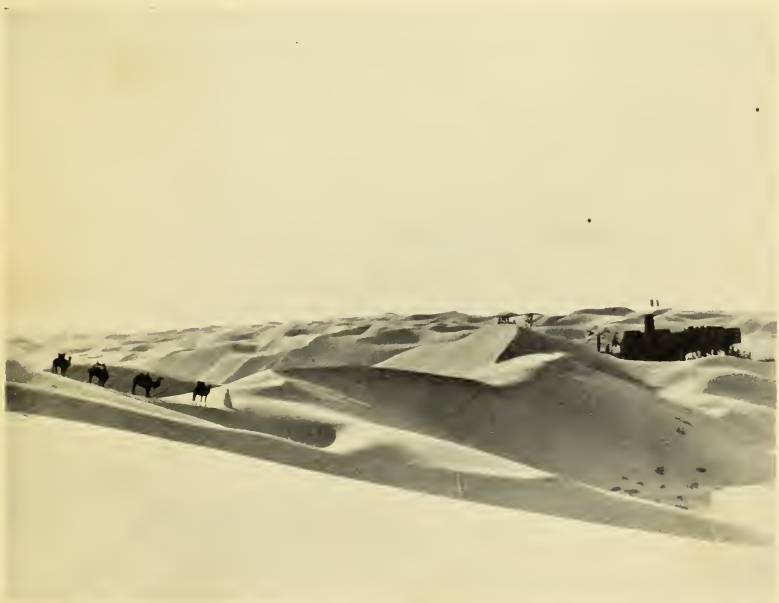
The next period may be called the era of names. Gradually films began to be known by the names of the people who made them or appeared in them, and the star-system was thus brought to the birth. D. W. Griffith, formerly an actor, made his first film in 1907. Miss Mary Pickford (née, in Toronto, Gladys Smith) appeared in her first picture for the old Biograph Company under Griffith in 1909, and within six years she was calling £2,000 a week an inadequate salary. About this time, also, was born the Wild West vogue, which not only brought Tom Mix, William Shakespeare Hart, and other equestrian heroes into the movies, but led to another epoch-making development—the trek to the West. The need for freer locations than could be formed in the neighbourhood of the Palisades and the Hudson River, in order to make "Westerns," took the producer far afield, while the need for sunshine and a warmer temperature in the winter months suggested to him the amenities of California. Hollywood had begun.

Meanwhile Europe had not been idle. Paul, Friese-Greene, and Williamson had given the British industry an excellent start, and, notwithstanding the unscrupulous efforts of unworthy persons who "duped" the positive films imported into America—that is, made pirated



Paramount.

CECIL DE MILLE "SHOOTS" THE EGYPTIAN CHARIOTS IN "THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS



Paramount.

A CALIFORNIAN SAHARA.

Used in "Beau Geste."

copies, which, by their badness, gave the originals a bad name—British films were in great demand. There was also a growing market for them in Germany and Russia, and the home screens showed a large proportion of home films, despite the popularity of the American Wild West pictures. The successful careers of the Hepworth Company, Messrs. Cricks and Martin, the British and Colonial Kinematograph Company, and the London Film Company up to the outbreak of the war is modern history.

France undertook the production of longer films with intensity, using for the most part historical subjects, which proved acceptable all over the world. The French Revolution was the most popular theme. It was a French picture, "Queen Elizabeth," with Sarah Bernhardt in the title-rôle, which Zukor acquired, when he determined to break the Edison combine in America in 1912, and which helped to give him the idea of persuading famous stage-players to appear in films he intended to make. Famous Players was the title he gave his company, and the word famous remains to this day in his present organisation, Paramount Famous-Lasky, the world's largest film concern.

The success of the French stirred the Italians in 1905 and 1906 to a great outburst of activity. They began at once to produce historical pictures on a grand scale, and their success was prodigious. Spectacle and crowd-scenes were the outstanding features of such productions as "The Fall of Troy," "The Three Musketeers," "Faust," "The Sack of Rome," and "Macbeth," and the pictures varied in length from 2,000 to 4,000 feet. Most successful of all was the renowned "Quo Vadis?" (8,000 feet), which was regarded as the world's greatest masterpiece before the war. Introduced to England and America in 1913,

it grossed gigantic sums of money for everyone concerned. The success of such pictures proved the feasibility of the long film, which was the next big development.

While Italy was turning out historical spectacles a new phase in the career of the film opened in America. At that time a little Londoner was touring the United States in a kind of pantomime-revue, entitled "A Night in a London Club," in which he attracted the attention of one Adam Kessel. The upshot of it was that Kessel engaged Charles Spencer Chaplin to appear in Keystone comedies for a year at Los Angeles, beginning in November, 1913. His salary was to be £30 a week, more than double what he was getting with the Karno show, and under the ever-imaginative, ingenious, and resourceful Mack Sennett, "Charlie Chapman," as Kessel would call him, made his first picture, "The Kid's Auto Race," and later the egregious "Tillie's Punctured Romance."

In every way Chaplin's appearance in pictures was significant. The enormous success of his films electrified the whole world and generated more force than any other factor to drive the whole business forward. The mere fact that the public of every nation insisted on seeing Chaplin's pictures was the most amazing thing in the history of entertainment, while every player in the world, stage and screen, was filled with a desire to emulate his success and to attain to the kind of remuneration he earned. More important, Chaplin's success definitely proved to big finance that the film's possibilities were limitless.

Early in 1916 Chaplin signed a contract with the Mutual Film Corporation, which gave him the astounding salary of £134,000 for a year's work. He was not quite twenty-seven at the time, but that he fully earned

the money is clear from the fact that the series of pictures he made for Mutual—including "Easy Street" and "The Floorwalker"—earned in Great Britain alone more than the whole of his year's salary. If further proof be needed of the astonishing expansion of the film at this time, it may be found in the example of Miss Pickford, ever a good business woman, who, in answer to the Chaplin contract, ran up her remuneration from Mr. Zukor to a million dollars for a year's work.

Thus we reach the present phase of the film's development, for meanwhile the war had burst upon Europe, and was to enable America to consolidate her position as the world's foremost film-country. She took up instantly the challenge contained in "Quo Vadis?" and before 1914 was out D. W. Griffith had produced the super-picture, "The Birth of a Nation," one of the most successful films ever made. "Intolerance," "Cleopatra," "The Queen of Sheba," "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," "The Orphans of the Storm," "Foolish Wives," "Robin Hood," "The Covered Wagon," "The Ten Commandments," "Ben Hur"—these are a few of the milestones on the road leading to the present day. Of the film situation as it presents itself now I shall have to speak in another chapter.

What of the future? I remember asking Signor Marconi in 1921 what chances there were of transmitting an instantaneous moving picture of the Derby by wireless. Several people, he said, were studying the possibilities, and only the cost of the experimental processes hindered further discoveries in this sphere. Where will be the film, as we know it now, when television is perfected? On a studio stage you will assemble a superb cast of all the most brilliant stars. You will have an orchestra of unparalleled accomplish-

ment, and the action will be performed by all the players in their appropriate costumes and make-up. A marvellous device combining the functions of camera, projector, and broadcaster will convey to numerous picture-theatres all over the country a complete entertainment (words and music synchronised with action on the screen) which will contain all the tense feeling and emotions of the perfect performance of a great opera. This will be no exhibition of canned studio emotions. It will be rather a movement back to pure theatre or opera for which the audience will be the world. Glasgow will hear *and see* an opera at Covent Garden. As I write, an American firm is launching a portable television set on the market, while Mr. J. L. Baird's demonstrations of "noctovision" and television at the meeting of the British Association at Leeds in August-September, 1927, are fresh in the memory.

It is surprising how conservative we all are. Numerous people, who study the film carefully, tell me that they are opposed strenuously to the idea of introducing colour on the film. They prefer the black and white and sepia tones. I have also heard opinions expressed strongly against the introduction of stereoscopic effect on the screen, a process that many inventors are trying to perfect. Neither colour nor stereoscopic effect is yet satisfactory, but any advance or experiment is worth encouraging. Talking-pictures are in the same state of imperfection, the amplification of all devices so far having proved inadequate. The industry of each country should possess its own research department devoted to developing the mechanical side of the camera, projector, and film.

CHAPTER II

BRITISH FILMS

THE Americans have been lucky over this film-business. Just when they needed money to expand it, along came the war, and everyone soon had money to burn. In the beginning American financiers were no more anxious than European banks are today to lend the film-man money. Enormous sums were lost, and ruin stared all pioneers in the face (ask Mr. Goldwyn, Mr. Loew, or Mr. Zukor), before the producer began to profit from experience. Gradually the financiers saw there was more in the film than a toy, and the receipts for munitions sold to Europe began to go into celluloid and the bricks and mortar of the new-fangled super-cinema.

Another thing: from the beginning the American producer has had to cater for a cosmopolitan audience. There are whole districts in Pennsylvania, for example, where the people today can speak nothing but German. The film-producer thus had excellent material on which to practise. He *had* to make a film with a universal appeal, a film that appealed not merely to the New York Irish, but to the Swede, the Hungarian, the Russian, the Pole. All kinds of tastes had to be considered, and the film was debarred from stressing any one national characteristic unduly.

It was not surprising, therefore, that in America almost all the film-business passed into Jewish hands. The Jews have a natural aptitude for evolving and

selling an article to suit many tastes, and it is their treatment and handling which enables the American film to circulate all over the world to the exclusion of the films of any other nation. They have never deceived themselves that they were artists rather than business men, and as soon as they realised there was money in the film they left no stone unturned to make it a financial success.

In Europe, and especially in England, the production of films has been a more dilettante occupation. In the early days here men were inclined to dabble in it as a side-line to the theatre, and it has never attracted much big finance until the present moment. It is a remarkable fact that scarcely any Jews belong to the British film-trade veteran's association, which is composed of men who were in the film-business in England before 1903. These veterans did pioneer work. They explored the possibilities of the home market, but I doubt if they ever visualised the enormous expansion of film-business in every corner of the world. They certainly knew nothing of "universal appeal." I am not arguing one way or the other; I am merely stating facts. I do not say it is good or bad that men with one type of mentality should control the business, but I do say that England has never yet been able to make pictures which appeal to all kinds of audiences, and I remark that it is a curious commentary that the Jew was not in the business at the beginning of things.

Credit must be given the American Jew for his perspicacity in discovering and exploiting the commercial picture, in evolving with infinite pains the mass-production of films—a much more difficult task than the mass-production of motor-cars. We in England have never looked on any branch of entertainment in that light, and we certainly never dreamed

that the film would outstrip the theatre. In the days of George Edwardes, American musical comedy was a much more comical joke than the most naïve British film shown today would seem in Cleveland (Ohio) or Kansas City, and when America challenged us over the film we let her have her way as long as London remained the dramatic fount for the two nations. The British Jews, who had since joined the industry here in large numbers, both during and after the war, though they brought increased bargaining power, never attempted any expansive British gesture, and even if they realised the need to produce British films with a wide, easily understood appeal, which was essential for building up the financial stability of the picture-theatres, they devoted no attention to it, because it was much easier to make money by buying or renting American pictures.

Needless to say, the Americans were elated by their success in England, and when they found that their British distributors were making handsome profits out of American films they took a step which strengthened mightily their grip on the English market. The principal American producing firms opened their own distributing exchanges in this country. Paramount took its pictures away from J. D. Walker, and opened their own distributing office in Wardour Street. First National formed a subsidiary company to handle their pictures here (the capital of the English daughter company has never been more than £100). An alliance between Sir William Jury, the *doyen* of the British trade, and Mr. Marcus Loew, entitled Jury-Metro-Goldwyn, was formed to distribute the Metro output. And so on.

The temptation after the war to make money more easily by renting American films was too strong for

many British producers, and though they did not all abandon production altogether, they began to treat it as a secondary consideration. The American predominance was tacitly acknowledged and American methods were recognised as ideal. Fewer and fewer British films became available for the actual weekly requirements of the bulk of the cinemas, and those films of average value and importance ("programme pictures," as they are called), which the British firms offered, were almost always much more expensive than the foreign stuff. In addition, the efforts to push and boost British films and to shake the American grip on the screens were inadequate and half-hearted. There was no corporate action by the British trade; the various sections were the bitterest enemies imaginable. The producers did not keep up to date, and rarely made a good film. The financial losses were terrible.

If circumstances had allowed us to develop along our own lines steadily and surely, if the war had not checked our production at a crucial moment, the British film might have retained as significant a place as the British theatre. We should probably have had little difficulty in selling our pictures abroad, because they would have been unusual and distinctive. But after the war we found ourselves in a quandary. We could not go on developing slowly a peculiarly national film, because we possessed no market for medium films in quantity, and we had not enough experience or money to make super-films. The Americans had taught our public to like their hard, brittle, shiny baubles at a time when we were most impressionable—when, during the war, any kind of entertainment was good enough.

That was where the American was so shrewd. He maintained his quality at a certain level, not, it is true,

very high, but good enough for the purpose. He learned the trick of making the people look, just as the cheap-jack knows how to make the lunch-time crowds listen, and under such conditions the question of good and bad films became of merely secondary importance. In America, they entitle this trick "picture-sense," a good expression, which suggests that the possessors of it understand and can satisfy the public's whims and desires. No European organisation has, as far as I know, acquired this knack adequately; possibly their ignorance of it may be the salvation of the film in the future. Who can tell? For the present, however, it is no use pretending that the universal provider has not got a use, and is often highly successful. It is easy to pooh-pooh him, but that does not change him. On the contrary, he thrives on the pooh-pooh treatment. A celebrated American Jew, whose sense of the public taste is almost uncanny, pins his faith in P. T. Barnum's remark made to a critical journalist: "I don't care what you say about me, good or bad, as long as you say something." His doctrine in film-production is similar. He does not care whether the films are good or bad, as long as one person says something about them to someone else, who is thereby induced to pass the gilded portals of the cinema.

The Americans would have been foolish, if, after securing the control of the market, they had not taken steps to maintain it. The method they adopted was the common or garden commercial device of selling in blocks. They used their best "super" products as a lever to get rid of their second-rate "programme" output. An American distributor says to the exhibitor: "You want a year's programme. Take my whole output, one picture a week, and you can have it cheap.

If you don't, you can't have A, B, and C pictures, which are big money-makers. I know you want *them*."

That is what the "block-booking" system amounts to. "Blind-booking" is merely an extension of the process. You book the pictures without seeing them or knowing they exist. Your foreign producer comes here, and secures contracts on the strength of a promise to supply films on a certain date, and the exhibitor agrees to take them rather than risk being short of pictures when the date comes round. Every exhibitor will book the big money-making pictures blindly—"The Ten Commandments," "The Covered Wagon," "Ben Hur"—but to obtain them he has usually to contract to take a large percentage of second-rate footage blindly as well.

The British producer and distributor have assuredly been found wanting, but the blame for the eclipse of British films must be shared also by the exhibitors, who have never once considered their responsibility for a national film policy. Except for a few enlightened individuals, the mass of exhibitors in Great Britain are not blessed with vision or foresight. They conduct their picture-theatres on a hand-to-mouth policy, and it has never dawned on them that they might have dominated the film-situation. They have never aspired to giving the producer orders.

A film-salesman told me once that he always enjoyed the joke of calling on one exhibitor in the East End, and suggesting the titles of a few of the films he had for disposal. The exhibitor invariably replied, "Half a mo', old man, while I call my daughter," and when the girl came, a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired child of twelve or thirteen, the exhibitor would say: "Maggie, do our folk like Tom Ranch, or Big Bill Canyon, or Sadie Vampire?" And what Maggie said always went.

Another small town exhibitor came to London and was heard at a trade-show to say: "What's all this *quotter* business I hear so much about?" Two Midland exhibitors were discussing the rival merits of stars in my hearing, and British pictures were discussed. The English actor, Ivor Novello, was mentioned, and one of the exhibitors said: "Novello's very popular in our district; his pictures always go well, and I think this 'Ben Hur's' going to bring him on no end." The other exhibitor smiled in a patronising manner and said of his companion: "Oh, don't mind him; he don't know the difference between Novello and Novarro. Names don't mean a thing in his life."

The utmost risk some exhibitors will run is a tawdry exploitation stunt, and their idea of publicity is so utterly sterile and naïve that it repels all except the least educated. We have all seen those pitiful little processions round the town of two or three dismal gentry clad in battered tin armour and mounted on weary delivery-van hacks released for the purpose after their day's rounds are done. One provincial exhibitor made some half-baked loon walk round the streets carrying boards with the legend, "I have been 'Womanhandled' at the Blank Cinema." The poor fellow was minus one sleeve and part of one trouser-leg, and this was actually considered to be good business, and the vulgar "stunt" was commended by one of the trade journals as a good method of advertising the ill-named picture.

It is not surprising that many people consider some exhibitors incapable of choosing a good programme, and even go so far as to urge a much larger quota obligation in order to prevent them showing so much bad foreign stuff. I know one cinema near where I live, which shows nothing but two or three years' old

"junk" films, which cost the house about 5s. apiece for a three days' run. That exhibitor has only himself to blame for the load of the Film Bill. He ought to think himself lucky it is not much heavier. Even supposing for a moment that all British films produced were "junk," absolutely fourth-rate, and the exhibitor had to book them, the average cinema would be no worse off than it is at present. The average audience, as a rule, is buoyed up by the hope that it will see a "Ben Hur" or a "Gold Rush" now and again. Otherwise it would never endure the rigours of some of the smaller cinemas. The music is bad, the attendants incompetent, the equipment of the building out of date, the seats uncomfortable. It is marvellous what the public will endure, and how the entertainment purveyor drives them. Now and then the public rebel and an exhibitor goes into liquidation.

I have stressed the position and importance of the exhibitor in the production problems for particular reasons which I shall explain later. Suffice it to say now that the producer is bound hand and foot to the cinema, because it is becoming increasingly difficult for the producer to make ends meet unless he is assured an outlet. His expenses and risks are so great. He has discovered that if he owned key-cinemas in which to exploit his pictures in his own way, he would be certain of securing better bookings from the neighbouring cinemas.

CHAPTER III

FILMS AND POLITICS

IN the attempts made in this country to revive film-production the worst figure by far has been cut by the Government. Up till a couple of years ago State officials would scarcely deign to speak to a film-man. He was beyond the pale, an impossible person, engaged in a contemptible occupation. State departments used every means in their power to frustrate the producer. He was denied all facilities, placed under police supervision, if he dared display a camera in public, and literally deprived of his livelihood in order that Whitehall might preserve its out-of-date dignity.

Government departments were perfectly certain that the film was ephemeral and could serve no useful purpose, and, with that dumb persistence inseparable from the bureaucrat, determined that it should be bound hand and foot with red tape. Admittedly, in the post-war period the film occasioned undesirable companies (so did every other industry), which brought the business into disrepute. But the deplorable and invariable inability of the Government to recognise true merit tied the hands of the worthy film-producer, and, rather than separate the good from the bad, the Government preferred to lump them all together as suspect.

There is no need to repeat that before 1914 British films fully held their own in the continental market as far distant as St. Petersburg and actually in America.

We are only concerned here with the present situation, We are making a few films more than we were a year or two ago, but about 90 per cent. of our programmes are still American. Indeed, it has been said that half the American producing companies' revenue comes from abroad, and a large part of that from England. It is certainly a great pity that we cannot produce satisfactory films. The ideal state of affairs would be to combine the American and German methods: turn out a large number of money-making films—that is absolutely essential for the prosperity of the business—and also make a few pictures which shall stamp our producing centres as capable of the finest individualistic work known. The Germans, though not much more stable financially than ourselves, have been among the most progressive film-makers; their technique and their handling of a story has taught the Americans much. But I have never heard of an American since the war coming to England and learning something about films. It is all the other way round. We must learn film-business method in America and the art of the screen in Germany. That is why abuse from certain newspapers and misguided patriotic bodies of our trade rivals is no sort of a policy, and such talk merely makes us a laughing-stock before the rest of the world. Moreover, our own people, who continue to patronise foreign pictures, frankly discredit it.

There has been far too much talk about the subject. When any other industry is depressed, the Board of Trade does not trumpet the fact to our foreign rivals. But that seems to have been the policy with regard to films, and not until seven years after the war was over did the Government face the problem seriously. Everyone recognised the commercial value of the film as an advertiser, and commented as long ago as 1919 on

the expansion of the movies in America into the fourth largest industry in the country. But no one did anything, and consciences were salved by the doctrine sedulously circulated that our climate was hopeless for film-making. No one pointed out that London is nearer to North Africa than New York is to Los Angeles, and anyone who had visited Los Angeles could have told us that a large and ever-increasing proportion of pictures was being made under cover. So the climate bogey is scarcely worth considering.

Unfortunately, the apparent apathy of the Government and "the City" had a disastrous effect. It left to the Press and the public orator the job of saving British films. During 1924 there began a gigantic publicity campaign, directed primarily against "the American film-invasion," and incidentally to re-establish British production. Has there ever been in the history of journalism such a Press stunt? Newspaper leaders, special articles, and questions in Parliament; full-dress debates in both Houses; visits to America and Germany to study conditions; attacks on the morals of foreign films, and efforts to prove that film was leading to an increase in juvenile crime, which statistics had proved was diminishing; serious medical warnings of the effect of the "flickers" on the human eye; abuse of the censorship of films, lurid "personal impressions" of the private lives of screen actors and actresses (as if that had anything to do with their professional appearances); public meetings; Hyde Park tub-thumping.

Periodicals and reviews that had previously disdained and ignored the film printed contributions from eminent people, who weighed in with deep and harmonious platitudes about its importance to the Empire. Party politicians joined in the fray, waving flags

furiously. Films even became a political issue. The film-trade took to wearing red ties because the Labour Government reduced the entertainment tax, a neat little political, vote-catching move. The exhibitors, furious at the fierce light shed upon their comfortable *laissez-faire* tactics, threatened to "use their screens for electioneering purposes," if severe action was taken to make them show pictures they did not want to book.

Ministers uttered vague threats about the inaction and disunion in the trade, and urged it to "get together" and evolve a British policy. The trade got together and fell apart quicker. How the producers, renters, and exhibitors loved each other! They fell affectionately on each other's necks and left the council chambers with metaphorical black eyes.

After six months' negotiation the members of the committee agreed in November, 1925, to request legislation:

(a) To compel them to handle and exhibit a 10 per cent. quota of home-produced pictures.

(b) To disallow long-distance contracts, which resulted in exhibitors overloading their date-books for months and even years ahead with foreign films, the quality of which had to be taken on trust, and the physical existence of which was by no means certain. It was well known that some American firms did not begin to produce their pictures until they had tied up their English market.

Then some influential exhibitors counter-attacked, and by dint of tremendous efforts just threw the scheme out on a straight exhibitorial vote, which many abstained from recording. Nine or ten months of desultory fighting followed in an atmosphere of fear lest the Government would take drastic action. While the trade quaked in its shoes, certain sections of the Press



Paramount.
NOAH BEERY AS SERGEANT LEJAUNE IN "BEAU GESTE."



Metro-Goldwyn.
LON CHANEY IN "THE ROAD TO MANDALAY."
Note left eye covered with special disc.

redoubled their vitriolic abuse of foreign films, and the patriotic bodies regurgitated their ill-digested plans and schemes.

Everything was postponed until that blessed convocation, the Imperial Conference, met in September, 1926, when seven or eight honourable politicians sat round a table and evolved nothing more considerable than what the trade conference had brought to the birth almost a year before. The Premiers did hint vaguely also at a species of Tariff Reform in the matter of films, a measure that would merely involve the public paying more for their entertainment and put a fat sum into the one-way-traffic-pocket of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Some hold the view that there was more significance in all this pother than mere bureaucratic procrastination. It was a curious coincidence that this tremendous campaign practically synchronised with the negotiations between this country and America over the war-debt. After all, during parts of 1925 and 1926 any stick was good enough to use on the wide gold-plated shoulders of our American cousins. So why not that thorny bludgeon, the film-problem? I don't suggest that the Government said deliberately: "Well, we feel America might remit a bigger chunk of our debts, if we advertised extensively that she was making most of the profits on her film-production out of Great Britain." But it is not outside the bounds of possibility that advantage was taken of the predominance of American films on our screens to point out to the United States Government that we bore no malice to our creditors.

The Government of this country, or perhaps one should say the permanent officials, learned a few things about Press publicity during the war. Who can forget the mythical movement of Russian troops complete

with snow through England in the late summer of 1914, or the still more wonderful story of human bodies being boiled down in German chemical works to provide glycerine for high explosive? And there is no doubt that the Press is used on occasion for Government ends, for every newspaper in the country today will "fall for a good story." I imagine the Government certainly profited from the anti-American film-campaign. Ministers professed to be seriously concerned about the shortage of British films, but could suggest no remedy. They were clearly playing a temporising game. They were nettling America, without allowing a serious breach to be caused. We can see that from what happened in the summer of 1926.

At that time the *Daily Mail*, one of the severest critics of American films, began an intensive anti-American campaign over the war-debt. America was represented as Shylock demanding his pound of flesh, and much bad blood was created. The campaign ceased as suddenly as it started. Lord Rothermere wrote long letters to the editors of the principal newspapers in the United States, disowning the policy of his papers, and disassociating himself from the views expressed by the editor of the *Daily Mail*.

I was in America at the time, and people talked freely, saying that they believed that the British Government had stopped the campaign. The speakers went on—after the usual expressions in favour of Anglo-American friendship, cousinship, bond of language—to deplore the continued campaign against their own films, a campaign which they considered the most active instrument militating against happy international feeling. So seriously did the American film-interests consider the matter that early in 1926 they sent a special commissioner, Colonel Edward Lowry, to represent

them in this country, and he spent a year looking after American film-interests in Europe, his headquarters being in London.

The Government's tacit approval of the film-agitation may have helped us to secure better terms for our war-debt settlement, but it did not induce the Americans to advance a step in the direction of reciprocal film-trading. They were no more inclined to abandon their monopoly of their own screens than they were of ours, and what production successes we achieved could hope for no market than what Great Britain provided; we were even debarred by American business skill from access to the Dominion screens.

As events turned out, it was a mistake to handle the film-problem for diplomatic ends. The trade suspected all Government proposals when at last they were put forward, and was always fearing fresh alarms and excursions, the result being that business suffered. In January, 1927, a man who handles American films in this country said to me: "Is there any other industry that would have endured being kept on tenterhooks by the Government for nine solid months?" Nor could the Government claim to have been engineering something useful to the solution of the problem, for, when in March, 1927, the inevitable Bill arrived, it was almost clause for clause a copy of the old trade committee's scheme, which was then eighteen months old.

The Government's Film Bill (March, 1927) proposed that everyone distributing films in this country should handle and everyone exhibiting films should show a quota—a compulsory proportion—of British films. The percentage was to start at about $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.,* which gives some idea of the enormous strength of the foreigner's position against which the Bill was

* Reduced in the Committee stage of discussion to 5 per cent.

directed. No film was to be hired out until it was available for inspection, and long-term contracts were forbidden, with the object of making more dates available for showing British films. In default of a more rapid increase of production, or of the trade itself getting together to stimulate production, this species of artificial respiration for the British film is, no doubt, an inevitable and reasonable measure, and most sensible people in the trade are inclined to give it a trial. It may very well give the home producer the chance he needs.

The main pitfalls that should be avoided are (1) mere slavish imitation of American modes, which would stand no chance of making money in America; (2) making an inferior brand of film and relying on the Government Bill to force it on the public, the surest way of bringing both Bill and film-producer into disrepute; (3) the supposition that a British film *quâ* British is more moral and more suitable for a British audience, for several British films have been banned in the Dominions, and also, by the way, in America; (4) the belief that the British films, produced under the quota Bill protection, will be any less obviously designed for box-office use than the American films, or any more conspicuously British in sentiment or tradition. There is not the slightest evidence, for example, that British producers intend wilfully to make propaganda films (apart from war-films) which in any way suit the wishes of the patriotic, flag-wagging organisations.

It has been argued that a quota is a severe imposition on the persons concerned. But, of course, it is not, the incidence— $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.—being so light that it will scarcely ruffle the surface of the trade's activities. A few dud American pictures will be kept out of the

country, and who cares? Heaven knows, there are too many. As for the picture-theatres, many are already finding it profitable to show a 10 per cent. quota (or higher) of British films voluntarily. So the trade cannot claim that the Government has ridden roughshod over its interests.

The real test of the scheme will come when it begins to work. It may very well have come too late (that is the Government's weakness), the lost ground to be made up being so enormous. The Americans have learned a thing or two from the effects of the German quota system (50 per cent. obligation on distributor only, not on exhibitor), and they may be able to circumvent our law. I have an idea, however, that despite all the talk, the Ministerial bungling, and the heavy financial losses, we shall pull through. If we do, we shall need all our energy and perspicacity, and the final result will be judged by the quality of the pictures made, and not by any other extraneous circumstances.

There is absolutely no reason to suppose that British films are going to depreciate in quality in the future. Opponents of the Bill argue that the artificial stimulus given to production will result in a glut of inferior pictures. At the present time the average exhibitor requires 200 pictures (each of six reels or more) every year. In a couple of years' time about 15 of these must be British. On the average, each exhibitor has two competitors—that is, there are about three cinemas in each district. This means that there must be 45 British films available for booking during the first year of control. Say there ought to be 60, in order to avoid putting a monopoly value on the 45. Is it unreasonable that in this country we should produce 60 pictures in a year? Ufa, Germany's largest company, produces between forty and fifty a year itself, and about 800

feature films are made in America, 700 of them being offered for renting in this country. There is a big scope for British directors of honesty and intelligence. There is room for any number of first-class brains in the British film industry, and the development of it is inevitable.

The Government really made a sad mess of the British film-problem. As far as the Bill goes, it is good under the circumstances. But why should we have been allowed to dither on until we are brought into those circumstances? The real truth is that the Government never wished to be dragged into solving the problem, and were only driven by the pen-pricks of the Press stunt. While the subject could be used diplomatically and politically it was worth something. Afterwards it became a fearful bore. It took the permanent officials years to gain even a smattering of the film-business's intricacies, and they hated the job. Officials have told me how they disliked tackling it. Few of them could raise any interest in the films; few of them, I suppose, had ever seen half a dozen films in their lives. The subject bored them. What a pity!

The publicity had been wholly wrong-headed, for from the public's point of view the newspaper "stories" have been incredibly dull. Neither duke nor dustman cares anything about block or blind booking, and scarcely anyone outside the trade knows what, for example, the term "renter" (the middleman who distributes the producer's article to the exhibitor, the consumer) means. Indeed, many of the public do not know the difference between British and foreign films, nor do they care where a film comes from, as long as it is amusing.

All that the talk has done is to create wrong, injurious impressions. First, it has represented us as struggling

against a foreign " octopus " (not my word), and that makes us feel small and suggests that our product is inferior. Secondly, the continual enlarging on Hollywood's advantages makes us feel we are badly equipped. Thirdly, every proposition for rehabilitating the industry here is explained to our rivals beforehand, so as to let him prepare to combat any advantage that may accrue to us. Fourthly, the idea has been propagated that British films, when they do arrive on the screen, will be welcomed, because the morals of many American films are bad; in other words, we are telling the public so much about our alleged high morality that they will be afraid our pictures are going to be dull. The public has a horror of paying money to have its mind improved. All these impressions have got to be lived down.

The best possible argument in favour of British films is usually forgotten. Hundreds of thousands of people here rarely frequent the picture-theatres, films in this country not possessing a tithe of the pull which they exert in America. Is it not probable that one of the principal reasons is that so few native pictures are shown, and many members of the public dislike an almost exclusively American diet ?

CHAPTER IV

THE AMERICANS' FAULTS

You may not like American films, but you cannot possibly disregard them. They are vital, they force themselves on your attention. Ninety per cent. of the world's programmes are American films. They constitute the fourth largest industry in the United States, the population of which is 120,000,000. Every one of those people go into a picture-theatre once a fortnight. By contrast, everybody in Great Britain goes to the movies once in six weeks. The Americans have the film-craze, and you feel you can know nothing of the film until you know something of America.

The expansion of America will be tremendous in the next few years. Despite any temporary economic setbacks, nothing can stop it, and our own future is so closely bound up with America's that we cannot afford friction with her. Of course, there are people in the two countries whose greatest pleasure would be to fly at each other's throats, but you cannot be in America long before discovering the wholesome respect that the best of her citizens have for this country. They do not imagine they can teach us anything in business, or that they are any smarter or more efficient. They realise to some extent the magnitude of our Imperial undertakings, and, while there is a large amount of sneering journalism and pamphleteering against our alleged hypocrisy in international affairs, and Anglophobia is often a useful enough topic for special and leading

articles, at the bottom of his heart the thoughtful American recognises the efficiency of the English language in binding together the principal supports of civilisation.

I came away from America with enormous respect for my own land and its history and traditions, and with a great admiration for the growing strength and developing capabilities of this marvellous new country. It is the misfortune of the United States that almost all the immigrants are drawn thither by the chance of making money. The risk is that every other creative impulse may be repressed. Art and literature are liable to be treated as occupations for the rich dilettante. Building is purely utilitarian, architecture and design are time-serving. The immigrant abandons his history and traditions on the boat, and is given no new history or traditions in their place.

The struggle to live becomes a struggle to out-distance rivals. French optimism, German thoroughness, Russian resignation, English adaptability, are all liable to be superseded by mere cupidity. No wonder, then, that many Americans are sincerely anxious to evolve a national philosophy, which shall satisfy the unconscious demands of a huge assembly of heterogeneous component parts.

America will find her salvation in the solving of her national problems. We tested our system in the Great War, and it proved surprisingly adequate. America is testing her tentative system, as she tackles her own gigantic problems—the coloured races within her borders, black and yellow; prohibition; “graft,” a direct result of the Klondyke attitude towards life; and international complications—for example, her own share in the Great War. I make no excuse for including the film among America’s major problems.

Nationally, she has not yet begun to appreciate the widespread nature of its influence. Otherwise, she might be more careful not to let herself be held up to ridicule so often through her pictures. The cynic will say that the rest of the world has little fear of being Americanised by the film, because most people leave the cinemas murmuring, " God, I thank thee I am not as these folk are, unjust, extortioners, adulterers. . . ." But that is not a healthy attitude of mind, and one that might be changed by more frequent conferences between American and British film-leaders. We don't like Americans who come here and want to show us how the " woild " should be run. Nor does America like unfair criticism. The American, however, does not always realise that, as he controls 90 per cent. of the world's film-business, he must inevitably take most of the knocks of criticism. But the criticism should be fair.

Mention of films today always conjures up a vision of Americans and American studios, and if any cause of offence is discovered, the Americans are sure to get the blame. In their own country they are careful to safeguard their interests by employing an ex-Cabinet Minister as their mouthpiece. Over here, and in Europe generally, they are too little concerned with the injurious reports that misinformed persons spread about them. I once heard Sir Alfred Mond inveighing against the false impressions of English history created by American films, and he instanced parts of " Nell Gwyn." Incidentally, " Nell Gwyn " was a British picture.

I don't believe in the so-called conspiracy of anti-British people in America to keep our films out of the country. This is all nonsense. Make a big picture, take it to New York, rent a theatre and show the film, suck in the public, and distributors will tumble over

each other to share in the money to be made in it. I have never heard of a British or German or French film concern attempting this plan. Of course, there are plenty of keen, even sharp, business-folk in American films who are not going to let you have it all your own way. But most of them are too busy to indulge in Machiavellian intrigues. The Americans have to find a market for 800 of their own films every year. They have not time to conspire against us, even if they wanted to do so.

They are business-men first of all, and we have to admit that so far the films they make have been more acceptable to the world than those made in any other country. Almost all the big films have been made by them, and almost all the successful films. They are the masters of our screens, and it is all the more surprising that they are masters often in spite of, and not by reason of, their methods. Certainly, their ideas are not always ours; indeed, Europe, as a whole, is often offended by their deplorable lack of sincerity, while their exploitation schemes and public pronouncements betray an entire absence of tact.

Why, for example, don't they use a little more dignity in their business? What unutterable tosh their boosting of themselves appears to us! Morris Gest asking the Home Secretary to help him choose an English actor to play in a film; the indecent drooling of film-stars via their Press agents on their marriages; cloying descriptions of contrasted honeymoons, and hackneyed claptrap about domestic joys, the value of work, and their arduous struggles towards "the peak of stardom"; how much longer will the transparent lying of much of the organised publicity continue to fool the public?

One could go on for ever quoting instances of the insincerity and wilful fatuity of supposedly sensible

business-men as soon as they begin "to go on record as saying" this or that platitude. Of course, there are very notable exceptions. But there are far too many men who believe it is their mission in life to startle or shock the public. It can't be done in France, where expensive advertisement and exploitation are taken to indicate that the article advertised is not strong enough to stand unsupported, and sooner or later other European nations will begin to call this gigantic bluff. It becomes increasingly difficult to "put over" a bad film in this country, and many educated people are driven away from the cinemas because of bad exploitation, illiterate titling, or idiotic film-themes.

The Press in England is regarded as fair game. All that a film-magnate thinks he has to do to secure a few paragraphs is to give some reporters or film-critics a heavy luncheon or dinner. This kind of stunt publicity is entirely out of date. A celebrated American film-star came to London and invited the Press to lunch to hear about his plans. He asked his English publicity man what he ought to give the journalists. Should it be gold watches or gold cigarette cases? "Why, you can't do that sort of thing here," he was told in horrified tones. And the athletic Adonis was amazed.

Why cannot the film-people be reasonable and sensible? If they have something good to say, let it be said, and don't let the time of the Press be wasted. The same applies to the material and information supplied about film-companies' activities. Every film-critic in London is deluged each week with a waste-paper basket full of "publicity matter." Much of it is written ungrammatically; some of it is illegible because too many holographed copies are run off the matrix; scarcely any of it is any use to the serious journalist. A little of it finds its way into provincial journals when

they are short of copy. But so shy are editors of film-stunt stories that they prefer to buy film-copy cheaply from contributors. Many of the publicity agents of film-companies can only get their stuff printed by supplying free-lance journalists with the best of it, which the journalists then sell as their own to the papers as often as they can. This complicated process is the best proof that the editor does not trust the film companies' publicity men to supply *bona-fide* news. And would you believe that some of these publicity people are paid the fantastic salary of £40 a week? Forty pence would be nearer the wages they earn.

The inefficient and dilatory behaviour of the film-companies is another cause for complaint. A man I know wrote to one American company asking a simple business question. Two months later he had had no answer or acknowledgment, and then a telegram had to be despatched before a reply could be obtained. I am told, too, that American companies keep the manuscripts of film-stories for months, being totally unable to make up their minds under half a year whether they want the material or not. I am glad to say that I only offer this evidence second-hand.

The most serious crime the film-men commit is wasting money. I don't care what they say about the cost of film-production and the "need for man-power," or scarcity of good directors, production-managers, and stars that the public love—far too much money is wasted. Some of the companies are gradually gaining a sense of proportion, and learning to take advice—the thing an American hates to do most heartily—but the fantastic salary still persists.* I can understand anyone

* Since this was written, a tremendous economy campaign has been launched in the American studios to impress the financiers, but it is too early yet to say how seriously it will be taken.

paying Galli-Curci or Dame Nellie Melba £1,000 for a single concert, for she *is* the concert; but Menjou is paralysed without his director at his elbow, and who cares for Cruze or for Cecil de Mille or for Griffith without the men and women whom he curses and cajoles on the studio stage?

Higher up the scale the big men devote half their energies to spending the thousands of dollars a week, which they can never hope to want, on promoting banks and building super-hotels or gambling in real estate.

What of the future? Will the film-corporations be able to draw on the financiers for ever? You may say: "Oh, but these men think in millions (the latest catch-phrase); what is a few million dollars any way?" Nothing at all, as long as they are well spent. But I wonder if the banks who finance production like to see the film-corporations' employees owning more money than they can spend? Why, these men will be coming along and offering to help the banks themselves to expand! Several film-men have founded new banks.

When you hear of a film-producer giving an English steward on a cross-Atlantic ship £50 for carrying out the work he is paid to do by the company owning the ship, merely because the fellow was civil for a few days, you begin to wonder whether the film-man is living in a fool's paradise, which is destined to crack up at any moment. One of the film-companies has realised the need for training its own stars, who will be available at reasonable prices. Others go on grabbing any likely person that comes along. One picture is often enough to secure a man or a girl an absurdly lucrative engagement. Or they try and entice away a successful player from another company—although there is an agreement not to poach—by simply offering more money.

Here is a true story to illustrate the point. A clever

young director was making good with "A" corporation, and doing well, earning \$400 or \$500 a week. "B" corporation asked him to come across the street. He asked "A" what he was to do. "A" said as a joke: "Ask 'B' to pay you \$2,000 a week: that'll frighten them off." Back came the reply from "B": "Accept your terms. Start at once." And "A," who particularly wanted to keep the man, had to offer him \$2,500 a week to prevent him going away.

A scenario or story writer may be employed by a film-company for a dozen years, and turn out a steady stream of useful material. Then one fine morning he evolves a special idea on which a really successful film is founded. At once he becomes a lion, whom everybody believes to be the greatest writer ever. All the companies within cabling touch offer him fantastic terms for three, four, five, or six stories, and he finds himself in the way of earning an immense sum of money and committed to write twenty stories in as many weeks' time. Of course, he cannot do it. He turns out pot-boilers as fast as his secretary or his "ghosts" can write, and the stories are delivered according to the contracts. Then the film-companies wonder why they have to employ a hack-writer to rewrite them.

In their terror lest anyone else should steal a march on them, the companies snatch at the chance of employing any people who are helping their rivals. A steady stream of directors and players troop yearly across the Atlantic, some to make good, others to achieve nothing. In their own countries, at least, the folk carried on their work steadily, but as soon as they have tasted American dollars they are ruined for life. There is far too much panicking by the producing companies. One makes a sea-story film, and immediately there is a flood of sea-films made in order to nullify the first one's value. The

film-companies should learn restraint and economy of resources, and should apply to themselves the rigid principles they employ in dunning a foreign exhibitor for a 1,000-dollar debt.

To make good pictures it is not necessary to flaunt your wealth. That may be good company-promoting, but it does not indicate a sound foundation. Some of the companies realise that steady progress is better than flashes in the pan, and that good dividends and a firm market are the best references. Other corporations are less stable financially, and in time will, no doubt, be pushed out of business. America has profited from the acquisition of war-wealth, but her more thoughtful citizens do not blind themselves to the possibility of a general slump. Hence the urgent need of stabilisation to withstand such a shock. The entertainment industry is the most sensitive barometer of prosperity, because immediately a man feels the pinch of reduced circumstances he starts economising on his amusements.

I do not know if 1926 was a peak year in American prosperity. If attendances at picture-theatres are anything to go by, it was certainly the highest point reached in America's history. The picture-houses on Broadway were packed when I was in New York from the moment they opened until midnight. Mechanics, who earn £20 a week, naturally have a large margin to play with, and they spend it on pictures, mainly because the cinema is much cheaper than the theatre.

Of course, America is wealthy. Her income tax is practically abolished (imagine what such a revolution would effect in this country !), and she can afford to spend enormous sums on building at great speed. The two things go very much together in New York. Quick building means an immense saving in the end. Six months after the foundations are laid the largest



Paramount.

BLOWING UP A FRIGATE OFF THE CALIFORNIAN COAST.

Scene from "Old Ironsides."



United Artists

SCENE FROM BUSTER KEATON'S FILM, "THE GENERAL."

A realistic "shot" of a train smash

building is being glazed and carpeted. Like banks, the film-companies use bricks and mortar as their principal security. You cannot build a firm on celluloid; it is too insecure a foundation. The companies that are attached to the ground are naturally more secure than those that have few or no picture-theatres.

But even bricks and mortar are not a gilt-edged security against general economic slump. The film-business in America has not experienced a real slump yet, such as befell us in 1920-21, and the resources of the companies have never even been tested. America with her gigantic credit systems—almost anything can be bought for five dollars down and the rest by instalments—would be highly susceptible to any serious economic disturbance. One cannot envisage the possibility of this yet, but naturally, if it does come, the film-people would be the first to suffer.

Another great factor in the maintenance of American film-prosperity—prohibition—is also of problematical value. Its strength lies in the difficulty of altering the Constitution back to pre-Volstead conditions. But if beers and light wines came back (the most likely thing to happen, if the principle of government by compromise, which controls most states today, gains more strength in the United States), the picture-theatres will find the reopened bars a big drain on their potential box-office money. All the breweries have retained their bars, and use them temporarily as soft-drink palaces, in the hope——

The future is entirely in the picture-theatres' hands. If they depend on the illusory support afforded by a state of prohibition and temporary economic strength instead of financial stability and a high standard of entertainment, the outlook is bleak. The companies cannot complain of lack of warning. All they need to

do is study the situation in this country, where it is so much more difficult to put a picture over. Films run much longer in New York than here. The Plaza run of "Beau Geste" was three weeks; in New York it ran more than seven months in one theatre. I do not think any film has had a longer run in England than in America.

One morning I walked round the lovely estate near New York of one of the film-industry's leaders, while he discussed the business. "You know," he said, "I dreamt last night I was broke; I might be easily. You never know your luck." I don't think there is any risk of this man's financial collapse, but others are not so strong, and the risks are prodigious.

The terrific competition in New York, Chicago, and other large centres of the radio, the dance-hall, and the "glory-barn," or money-making religious tabernacle, has to be considered. It is said in New York that, if the film-companies relax their vigilance and aggressive policy a moment, their receipts slump. In many places at some periods of the year the picture-theatre does not play to paying business except on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. All the energies are concentrated on packing 'em in on those days, and if the efforts fail, there are angry shareholders to be encountered on Main Street, scanning anxiously the quotation lists. The jumpiness of the market is illustrated by the case of Warner Brothers, whose shares recovered sharply as soon as the success of their vitaphone (talking pictures) seemed at all likely.

The mere expenditure of £30,000 as the average cost of a picture is a weighty consideration. The short life of a film is another. Delay in exploiting a finished picture may be fatal, for nothing dates more quickly than a photograph—look through your old family

album if you want evidence. Few films can be re-issued satisfactorily. They almost all look poor and second-hand. The dresses are all wrong, the technique seems old-fashioned, the continuity may be jerky. A film is much more rigid than a play, which can be easily adapted and changed. The average film's life lasts only a few weeks in any one country—key-theatre run, first, second, third, and fourth runs, plus a few odd bookings—and the picture joins its predecessors in the company's morgue. Profits have to be secured quickly; hence the highly commercialised nature of the business, and hence the temptation to produce solely for the box-office.

In the future greater commercial tension is to be expected, and waste must be eliminated. Increasing competition from Europe will urge the Americans to greater efforts and greater efficiency, and many of the old hands who believe that display always means quality will disappear. A wiser, more dignified policy may result, which may lead to a general improvement of quality.

CHAPTER V

THE DOMINATING DOLLAR

IT is scarcely necessary at this point to explain that the dollar dominates the American film-situation. I have already emphasised how arduous is the production of films and how precarious. But I think I should say something of how the finance of the American business operates. There are now six principal corporations and several smaller firms involved in producing American films:

1. *Paramount Famous-Lasky*, the world's largest firm, of which Adolph Zukor is the President, and Jesse L. Lasky the production chief. Distributes its own films and owns or controls 400 key picture-theatres.

2. *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*, owned and controlled by Loew Incorporated, of which the President is Marcus Loew, with Louis B. Mayer in charge of production. Distributes its own pictures and controls about 400 picture-theatres.

3. *United Artists*, primarily a distributing organisation, of which the President is Joseph Schenck. Distributes the films made by Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Miss Mary Pickford, and Samuel Goldwyn, and the output of another corporation which includes the D. W. Griffith, Gloria Swanson, John Barrymore, Buster Keaton, and Talmadge sisters pictures. Building twenty large cinemas and controls others.

4. *First National*, primarily a distributing organisa-

tion which has just completed a large new studio at Burbank, a few miles north of Hollywood. Controlled by large circuits of cinemas (Stanley Theatres and West Coast Theatres).

5. *Universal*, controlled by Carl Laemmle, a prolific producer of programme pictures. Controls over 200 cinemas. Own distribution.

6. *Fox*, controlled by William Fox, and with Winfield Sheehan in charge of production steadily making progress into the first rank of units. Controls the Fox circuit of cinemas, including the Roxy in New York, the world's largest picture-theatre, and is acquiring more. Own distribution.

7. *Warner Brothers* control a circuit of cinemas. Own distribution.

8. *Producers' Distributing Corporation*, formed mainly to distribute the Cecil de Mille pictures. Interested in the Keith-Albee big circuit of theatres and vaudeville houses.

There are, of course, also many small production companies, which make good pictures, such as the Christies, Charles and Al, who established the first studio in Los Angeles. Most of these distribute through the large corporations.

Practically all the films are now made in California. Up till the spring of 1927 Paramount Famous-Lasky maintained a large studio at Long Island, New York. Then the whole organisation was transported to the company's new studio on Melrose Avenue, Hollywood, and only a few small units continue to produce in the East. It was found too expensive to keep two enormous plants running; centralisation spelt economy. This centralisation move is typical of the whole business.

No amount of centralisation, however, will alter the

fact that daily it becomes more difficult to make ends meet in production. The expenses are staggering. When your weekly pay-roll includes over 2,000 people in the studio alone, one or two of whom draw every Saturday £800 each, and the good scenario-writer and "gag-merchant" can ask what salaries they like, the chance of making a profit on fifty, sixty, or seventy pictures a year becomes steadily less and less. The profits on a brilliant and successful film may easily be swallowed up by the losses on half a dozen others.

And then your picture has to go through the expensive process of distribution. It must be offered, contracted for, sold and delivered to the picture-theatres in every corner of the world, and some idea may be gained of the cost of this from the fact that a distributor may ask 50 per cent. of the gross takings for his trouble. The big producing companies, as we have seen, distribute their own pictures, and no doubt find it cheaper than employing a separate middleman. The smaller producers sell their films either outright for a lump sum to an influential distributing concern or on a percentage basis.

Distribution is an extremely complicated business. Selling films is not like selling boots or knives—for a fixed price. Every film has a different selling-price in every picture-theatre. Obviously, the distributor cannot push up the price of a first-class film beyond the amount an exhibitor can pay. The picture-theatre holds a certain amount of money, and there are overhead expenses to be met. The capacity of a house controls the price. Thus, picture-theatre A on Main Street may pay £500 a week for the first run of a film, but picture-theatre B in Bye Street may get the same film at the same time for £50, provided Main and Bye Streets are not close enough together to affect each other's business.

The exhibitor, of course, lives in a continual state of price-war with the distribution, but that does not do him any harm, and, if he is a man of mettle and wants the best stuff for his public, the competition keeps him up to the mark. If he is an independent unit or a member of a small circuit, his troubles end there. He ought, without difficulty, to be able to find 104 or 208 (two or four a week) pictures out of the 800 produced every year, and, well managed, his theatre should make plenty of money. Obviously, he has less anxieties than the producer.

It is the prosperous look of some of the exhibitors which has caused a change in the film's business methods. Within the last few years the producer-distributor, looking round for methods of stabilising his business, has come to realise the necessity of "assured outlet" for his pictures. He cannot rely any more on free trade. He must guarantee that the pictures he makes are shown, and experience has proved that the surest method is to get possession of "key-theatres." A theatre is selected in the centre of a largely populated district, such as London, Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, Belfast, Kansas City, Chicago, Minneapolis, Denver, Detroit, and used for special exploitation runs of new pictures. Daily Press and word-of-mouth publicity circulates, and the smaller houses in neighbouring districts are influenced to book the picture. The small exhibitor must have his ration of films every year, and he is naturally attracted by those that are given a good boost. Moreover, he will often agree to book a picture, provided it is given a prior run at a key-theatre in his district, so long as it does not actually poach on his own patrons.

The principal producer-distributing corporations have now acquired, and continue to acquire, key-

theatres. Paramount Famous-Lasky have 400 houses, as we have seen. Three distributing concerns—Producers' Distributing Corporation, Pathé of America, and Film Booking Offices of America—recently formed an alliance with the Keith-Albee and Orpheum circuits of vaudeville theatres. Mr. Marcus Loew, who was originally head of a vaudeville theatre concern, saw the need for making his own films, and bought two or three production units in Hollywood, which he fused into Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, now the second largest producing and distributing concern. Loew Incorporated continues to compete closely with Paramount Famous-Lasky in the race for key-theatres, and are building steadily new 3,000-capacity houses in dominating positions.

The combination of producing, distributing, and exhibition under one hand—a species of "trustification"—is a tendency that cannot be ignored, and its logical development is that the 400 theatres which the principal corporations each possess might in the future become 4,000; in other words, that the exhibitor as an independent unit might cease to exist. Combination obviously results in stability—at any rate, it appears so from the stock quotations of Paramount and Loew—and, to seek a parallel elsewhere, the continued existence of Ufa in Germany, despite terrifying losses, is due, not so much to Government and Deutsche Bank money at their back, but to the possession of 130 key-theatres in various parts of the Reich. Moreover, the possession of a circuit of theatres makes the producing end more careful to turn out box-office pictures.

The dominance of the picture-theatre in film-deals is clearly demonstrated in the one other method of film-trading used in America and not yet described here. I refer to the "franchise" system, under which the



U/a.

THE "FORCED LABOUR" SCENE IN "METROPOLIS."

Inset: A back view of the structure, showing rollers.

theatres themselves actually control the producing company. That was how First National was founded in 1917. Twenty-three exhibitors and exhibitorial groups invested money in the company, paying part of the cost of the production of a steady output, and in return they became franchise-holders in the company, with certain rights to vote at the meetings of the board, and the first call on the pictures produced. It was a kind of programme insurance. The scheme worked well, and First National, under J. D. Williams's management, and with the Talmadge sisters and Chaplin as the principal stars, made a lot of money. It was worth while if you were a franchise-holder to be assured, for example, of all those first-rate Chaplin pictures made before "The Gold Rush," pictures such as "The Pilgrim" and "The Kid." More recently, First National has developed still further in the direction of exhibitor-control. Chaplin and Schenck went to United Artists, and the Talmadges' contracts ran out. But new faces appeared, and the splendid new studios at Burbank (Los Angeles) were completed in 1926 under the direction of Robert Lieber and Richard Rowland. Early in 1927 there were whispers of another deal, which materialised in March. The control of First National was acquired conjointly by two influential circuits of picture-theatres known as the Stanley Corporation and the West Coast Theatres. The deal, incidentally, was arranged by the Morgan banks, in order, it was said, to preserve the existence of one non-Jewish production company. Later developments are said to have brought up the number of theatres in the group to 600.

Signs are not wanting that the exhibiting interests in this country are watching these developments closely. The ideal method of business for a small country like

Great Britain would be on a percentage basis, the exhibitor giving a percentage of the gross returns to the distributor, who passes on the proper share to the producer. Unfortunately, no one in the British film-trade trusts his neighbour, and the exhibitor prefers to haggle, paying as small a lump sum as he can for each picture. The distributor says the exhibitor is greedy and mean, and the exhibitor says the distributor is grasping and ruthless.

The exhibitor takes a chance with every picture. He may pay a fairly big price, and be out of pocket if the film flops. But, on the whole, more usually he is over-careful than prodigal. I heard of an extraordinary case in which a courageous distributor refused to take £100 for a single week's exclusive run of a travel-picture, because he thought the price far too small. Instead, he hired a hall in London and grossed a cool £2,000 a week for five months. There is no doubt that much money is made in exhibiting.

In 1911 a man called on a friend of mine and asked for a job; he was down to his last £5. Then a lucky chance came; he took over a derelict cinema, turned it into a success, and added other houses to his charge. When he died in 1926 he was worth £36,000, and the business he had built up was sold for £300,000. Another man bought a picture-theatre for £25,000, worked it up, and sold it a year or two later for £100,000. And yet the half of the exhibiting possibilities in this country have not been exploited. The percentage of regular patrons is miserably low, and much film-going is casual. The whole business, indeed, here is too casual.

Sooner or later we shall see the American plan adopted here. The production companies cannot be prevented from acquiring key-theatres. Indeed, they already have acquired a few. Paramount Famous-

Lasky control the Plaza and Carlton in London, the Theatre Royal in Manchester, and the Futurist and Scala in Birmingham.* Metro-Goldwyn own the Tivoli in London, and are building the New Empire in Leicester Square. Universal owns the Rialto in London and the Rialto in Leeds, and there can be little doubt that in the future all the American corporations will own more theatres.

Now take the British firms. The recently formed Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, comprising three producer-distributor companies (Gaumont, Ideal, and W. & F.) have acquired four theatres in London (Marble Arch, Shaftesbury Pavilion, Lavender Hill Pavilion, and Shepherd's Bush Pavilion), sixteen theatres in prominent London and provincial centres formerly contained in the Biocolor circuit, and another house at Grimsby—twenty-one in all.

British International Pictures, which recently acquired the new studio at Elstree, has for its chairman Mr. John Maxwell, who is also chairman of Wardour Films, a distributing concern. Mr. Maxwell, further, has large private interests in a group of cinemas in Scotland. Mr. I. W. Schlesinger, another director of B.I.P. with a say in its conduct, is in absolute control of the whole picture-theatre system of South Africa. He is an American.

The position of exhibition in Great Britain is curious. There are hundreds of picture-theatres controlled singly by independent exhibitors. There are numerous small circuits of cinemas owned by limited companies.

* Early in 1927 the Exhibitors' Association protested against the acquisition of the two Birmingham cinemas by a foreign producing company. Paramount bowed before the storm and permitted the houses, at least nominally, to be administered by an English company.

And there is Provincial Cinematograph Theatres, Ltd. (of which Lord Ashfield is the chairman), the largest group in the country, which contains some 120 houses, with headquarters at the New Gallery, London, and exercises a powerful influence in trade politics. Many small groups and individual exhibitors follow the lead taken by P.C.T., and a distributor thinks twice before he offends the big circuit. If the circuit refuses to book a picture, a distributor may be seriously embarrassed.

Moreover, P.C.T. employs the "barring" policy, by which it will not book a picture if the picture is booked to any other theatre within seven miles of it during the same week. When complaints are heard against overbearing and domineering behaviour of foreigners, it is as well to remember that the foreign firms sometimes like to air legitimate grievances against their powerful customer, P.C.T.

It seems never to have occurred to the exhibitor of this country that some day he may be called upon to take a hand in production. Suppose, for example, American pictures ceased to draw in this country. The exhibitor here always takes life too easily. He has never had any ambition to be a producer also, because he has always been able to get all his pictures from America. But what if the Americans take over his picture-theatres, or freeze him out of business by building new up-to-date cinemas opposite his own? So far exhibitors here have scarcely considered the possibility of the Americans putting into effect here the secured outlet policy, and they may find themselves in a quandary one day.

It is all a question of money—the dominating dollar. Will the Americans be content to take a rental for their pictures for ever in this country? Will they not also

want to share in the exhibition profits, especially when improved economic conditions lead to bigger spending on entertainment by the public? That is the problem the exhibitors of this country will have to face. At the moment, the control of our film-industry is in the hands of nobody in particular, but there is good reason to suppose that it will not remain there indefinitely.

Whoever wants to control the film-industry in this country must needs secure the key-theatres and those houses which are in a position to employ the "barring" device. It is for picture-theatres such as these that pictures are primarily manufactured. Mr. Robert Nichols, in his illuminating articles published some time ago in *The Times*, while advancing the theory that films were made to please poor intelligences, declared the public, which the American producer had in mind was "the hicks," the middle westerner, and the small towners. This theory seems wrong to me. The American industry is far too highly commercialised to worry about "hick" minds. The producer is after more wealthy game. His goal is the key-theatre public, the fairly sophisticated townsman. The "hick" will attend any picture, however bad, because he has nothing else to do in the evening. But the townsman has numerous other attractions—theatre, radio, and dance-hall—and the picture must "level up" to a certain standard.

Pictures are made primarily for the Los Angeles picture-theatres, where they are shown in advance of general release from the studios, in order that the producer may be able to test their entertainment value. The producer must have some criterion, and the hard-boiled public audiences of Los Angeles, who are not so easily carried away by the glamour of Hollywood, familiarity with which has bred a certain amount of

indifference, are selected as representative of average key-theatre-goers.

The future of the business in this country and in America lies in the hands of the owners of the key-theatres; the Americans already have their appetites whetted in America for exhibition profits, and so important is the market here, and so much more important will it become in the next few years, that if the Americans capture it, the "trustification" of the industry is in a fair way to be accomplished. Naturally, the men with the longest purse and the greatest staying power have the best chance. The dominating dollar is always sighing for more worlds to conquer.

CHAPTER VI

“ TRUSTIFICATION ”

THE American film-magnate will strenuously deny that the film-business is becoming a world-trust. But many Americans think otherwise. For the last three or four years a Federal Commission has been trying to prove that the Paramount Famous-Lasky Corporation has made use of unfair business methods, which have led to the extinction of individual producers, distributors, and exhibitors. The Commission asks why Paramount needs 400 theatres, and is always adding to the number, when primarily it is a production unit. (I have been told that the American corporations are pretty sharp on the “ little fellow ” when they decide to take his business from him.)*

In other words, the United States Government views with concern the growing power within America of a single corporation in so important a field of enterprise as the films. Paramount, as has been shown, is not the only firm intent on assuring its position, and the American Government merely chose to examine the methods of Paramount, because it is the biggest organisation. We have seen how the principal production units are involved in distribution and exhibi-

* Since this was written the Commission has pronounced Paramount's trading methods unfair to the small exhibitor and has ordered the firm to divest itself of some of its properties and holdings. It has also decreed the abolition of “ block-booking.” How far these orders can be carried out is problematical at present.

tion, and their strength is demonstrated by their ability to crush opposition.

In the expensive matter of distribution nothing is left to chance. Independent distributors in this country—or renters, as they are called—have flourished in the past, and some of them are still successful. But all the principal producing companies now distribute their own films all over the world—first, for the sake of efficiency, using their own offices in all capital cities; and, secondly, to save the expense of providing profits for middlemen. The independent American distributors and exhibitors fought hard to resist the encroachments of the big corporations. There were threats of boycotts, but the juggernaut of big finance rolled on regardless of protests.

More recently the same thing has happened in England. I have already mentioned that when last year Paramount had gained control of two central picture-theatres in Birmingham, groups of exhibitors all over the country protested in support of their Birmingham colleagues against the policy of producer-owned cinemas, and a boycott was proclaimed.

In 1925 and 1926 efforts were made by Joseph Schenck to arrange for the Chaplin, Fairbanks, Pickford, and other pictures in the same group to be distributed by Metro-Goldwyn for the sake of economy. Joseph Schenck's brother, Nicholas Schenck, is executive vice-president of Loew Incorporated, which controls Metro, and the move was regarded favourably by all concerned except one man—Chaplin. He objected for two reasons. He admitted that the "merger" would save all the enormous expense of a separate distributing organisation, but he declined to have his pictures run in with numerous others of varying quality, and he resented being associated with the trust principle.



Ufa

FRITZ LANG DIRECTING SCENE IN "METROPOLIS"

Camera is between mercury lamps in foreground.



Ufa

"SHOOTING" A SCENE IN "METROPOLIS."

Note flood of mercury-vapour lighting.

A keen business-man himself, he considered that exhibitors should be exhibitors, and it was not the function of a producer to own theatres, as Metro did. The whole of this immense deal, therefore, fell through, and Schenck had to set about a new plan involving huge expenditure. In passing, it is worth noting Chaplin's importance at that time. He was producing, on the average, only one picture a year, but that picture was too important to be left out of consideration. At the end of April, 1927, it was officially stated that “ The Gold Rush ” had earned £445,000 up to date, of which Chaplin had received three-quarters; in other words, the distributors only got 25 per cent.—a low rate.

A further factor of great importance is the close friendship between Mr. Zukor and Mr. Marcus Loew—the heads of the two largest film-firms in the world. Mr. Loew's son married Mr. Zukor's daughter. Both Mr. Zukor and Mr. Loew will tell you that this friendship has nothing to do with business. They are as keen rivals in the studio and theatre as they are on the golf-course, or in the matter of beautifying their glorious country-houses. If Mr. Zukor added three holes to his private golf-course, Mr. Loew would be much more anxious than if Mr. Zukor had tried to buy up United Artists ! But why should not Paramount and Loew Incorporated unite, if it means greater economy, better pictures, more expansive profits ? I asked a well-known film-man in England, who is *au fait* with all American picture-business, if they ever would, and all he replied was that it was an unfair question !

The Americans deny that they aim at world-control of all sides of the film-business. It is no good arguing against them. All that one can do is state the facts

as one sees them in, for example, the British Empire. The main market, of course, is Great Britain; then there is Australia, South Africa, Canada, and India, and the smaller colonies. Take, for example, the West Indies. Nothing but American films is seen. Mr. M. A. Wetherell, who went to Trinidad and Tobago to produce "Robinson Crusoe," declares that a great fuss was made in Trinidad when a British film was announced. It turned out to be that egregious effort, which purported to tell the secret history of Lord Kitchener's death in H.M.S. *Hampshire* in 1916. There is something truly ironical in this fact. The picture was withdrawn from circulation in America at the direct request of the British Government, because it was a tissue of falsehood from beginning to end. But it was the only picture that the West Indies could obtain to celebrate a British film-week.

About 90 per cent. of the pictures shown in Australia on the average are American, though one prominent group of picture-theatres claims to show as high a percentage of British pictures as 14½. The position in Australia is that the large circuits of picture-theatres control the situation. Altogether, there are about 1,200 cinemas in the Commonwealth, of which about 800 are second-rate buildings, and 150 are in the Union Theatres, Hoyt Theatres, and J. C. Williamson circuits, who are more or less allied, and have working arrangements not to spoil each other's business. Moreover, these 150 pictures include all the key-theatres of importance—that is, those houses which influence the booking of smaller cinemas within their orbit.

In the past, American pictures have won an enviable popularity, and the Australian trade are fully convinced that their prosperity is bound up with the

American film. Many Australian houses take the complete annual output of American producing houses. Union Theatres have bought all the First National, Producers' Distributing Corporation, and Film Booking Offices outputs for three years. Rightly or wrongly, there is a feeling, in the Australian trade, voiced by the film-journals, that any increase in the number of British films shown is a serious risk to business, and the British producer can only live that impression down by turning out first-rate films. “ *Mademoiselle from Armentières* ” is the best ambassador for British pictures there has ever been since the war, and will probably achieve more lasting good than any of the deliberations of the Federal Film Committee, which has been investigating the causes of the dearth of British films, laudable though its recommendations may be.

What British pictures need most is a film-exchange in Australia, and an effort has been made by Alderman Watt and Senator Guthrie, resulting in the formation of British Controlled Films, Ltd., which aims at distributing British films only in the Commonwealth. It has a big job, for Australasian Films, Ltd., which distribute almost all the films required by the three main groups (apart from those which the American firms distribute themselves), is a strongly entrenched concern, and is not going to give anything away to a new business rival. Australasian, by the way, is dabbling in production, and has now made two pictures in co-operation with American concerns at the Bondi studio near Sydney.

Theoretically, of course, the Australian picture-theatres are free agents to book what they like. Actually, they have put their faith in the American film, and it will require a cataclysmic upheaval to shift them, and

the only sound method would be for the new British concern to build their own theatres. Once more we come back to the all-important subject of theatres, and that calls for much capital. And if they are the dominating factor in Australia, what about South Africa ?

South Africa is even more thoroughly Americanised. Practically all the theatres are owned by African Theatres, Ltd., of which Mr. I. W. Schlesinger, an American by birth, is the principal. The picture-theatres throughout the country are divided into three groups, the " A " circuit, the " B " circuit, and the " C " circuit. The whole of the programme for the year is determined for each circuit in New York at the beginning of the film-year (September), and no programme can be altered. The films are chosen from the outputs of the principal producing companies. It is practically impossible for any South African independent to book a picture from America. If a British firm, for example, was willing to supply pictures to a new picture-theatre not in the African Theatres Syndicate, the theatre would be able to obtain no pictures for the rest of its programme from any of the leading American firms, for they agree with African Theatres not to supply anyone else with films. Occasionally, an American producing firm rebels. United Artists, for example, tried in 1926 to show " The Black Pirate " (Douglas Fairbanks) in the City Hall at Johannesburg, but the picture was ultimately withdrawn, the reason given being that United had " over-estimated the value of the non-coloured market for films in South Africa."

African Theatres, however, leave nothing to chance. In 1926, when a British Government film-measure seemed inevitable, and the possibility of the imposition

of a quota became probable, Mr. Schlesinger joined the board of British International Pictures. He went back to South Africa in December and informed the Press that the inclusion of a $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. quota of British films in all Imperial programmes would soon be made compulsory. As the quota will probably be smaller than this, he was working with a safe margin.

If South Africa decides to enforce a British quota, African Theatres will be able to put British pictures in their programmes. But that does not imply that there will be any free and independent trading. There will be no chance of British pictures getting a better show, however more numerous they might become, than that demanded under the quota scheme. I merely mention these facts to show how closely the African market is tied up.

In Canada the position is that the Americans have simply overflowed across the border, and control about 90 per cent. of the screens, partly because of the proximity of the great film-distributing centre, New York, and partly from superior distributing efficiency. Sporadic efforts are made to foster production and arrange for adequate distribution of British films, and the Press is strongly patriotic on the subject. If a quota is imposed, American houses will be able to circumvent it to some extent by having pictures produced in British Columbia by nominee companies. In Canada especially it is the case that the habit of preferring American films in the absence of British has become ingrained in the audiences, and Paramount Famous-Lasky have a particularly strong hold on the market.

Practically the only pictures shown in India and in the steadily growing market in China are American, and little or no attempt is made by any other country

to export films thither. Incidentally, I am told, only the worst of the films ever get there, the junk and rubbish, because it is cheap. With their large home market to help them, the Americans can afford to sell the junk for a mere song. Provided his audience is not too captious, an English exhibitor can secure some kind of programme of American films for a whole week for £3 or £4.

What of the Continent? Statistics prove that the number of American pictures shown in Scandinavia and France increases each year. Italy is considering the imposition of an obligation on her distributors and exhibitors to handle and show home-produced films, in order to limit the number of American films on her screens. Germany, despite an obligation on distributors to put out a German picture for every foreign picture, sees the tide of American films still rising.

Paramount, Metro, and First National have one united distributing concern, known as Fanamet, to safeguard the interests of their pictures on the Continent. In addition, Paramount, Metro, and Universal, combined in an organisation known as Parufamet, have a working arrangement with Ufa, the principal German firm. They lent it money, and secured thereby, the release of fifty American pictures in Germany annually to ten Ufa pictures in the United States.

Ufa, owing to trading losses, had to reorganise in the spring of 1927, and that will, no doubt, contribute further to the stabilising of American interests on the Continent, for Ufa was America's strongest European rival.

CHAPTER VII

AMERICAN PERSONS AND PERSONALITIES

I SUPPOSE the most striking characteristics about American film men and women are their capacity for hard work and their inability to discuss any other subject except films. Both are undertaken with intensity. The urge that big salaries create is certainly astonishing. You cannot tear some of the heads of departments away from office or studio. I mentioned earlier something of the keen competition they have to meet.

I found many of the film-folk living in terror of their lives, fearful lest someone shall steal a march on them, frightened lest the receipts shall not outbalance expenditure. It is a business of tremendous risks, and yet there are great rewards. It is a business where young men and women can climb to the top. Take, for example, Irving Thalberg, who, when he was twenty-five, became one of the principal executives of Metro-Goldwyn, one of the three or four on a committee which dispense between $1\frac{1}{2}$ and 2 million pounds sterling every year in production.

Of course, there is a sharp line of demarcation between the successful ones and the plodders in the business. Everyone does not earn £500 a week, as might be supposed from the ordinary descriptions of Hollywood and New York. But everyone is straining to attain to such a salary, and while many fall by the way, a few come to the top.

Marcus Loew started life as an errand-boy, without a dime to bless himself with. But he had a pretty good sense of putting two and two together, and today you can see him in his wonderful Long Island home with his private bathing-beach and pier, his golf-course attached to the house, his sixty gardeners, his acres of greenhouses, his great circular bathing-pool set in a tropical conservatory. Yet with all this semi-feudal state he is the most modest of men, beloved of his staff and a great host.

I was told that one of the film-magnates, whose house I did not visit, had enough liquor in its cellars to last the full house consumption for fifty years. And most of the stuff is "pre-prohibition." That description corresponds in a sense to our expression "pre-war." You always run a risk when you are dealing with bootleggers; you may get the rankest poison. But this man of whom I speak equipped his country-house with new cellars just before prohibition came into force, and the day or two before the actual date waggons were arriving all day carrying the entire stock of one of New York's largest hotels and stowing it in the new cache. You can get any kind of wine or spirits which you care to specify. It is all there. Even so, I found the film-folk on the whole abstemious. They can't afford to let drinking interfere with their work.

A dozen or more visitors will be welcomed at a film-chief's house during a week-end. The time of arrival is about two on Saturday, and you get some tennis or golf in before six, when it is time to adjourn to the house for a drink. Dinner is at seven, and afterwards one of the latest pictures will be screened in the private projection theatre without music. The picture is watched "cold" without any aids to get it over.

Everyone talks films practically all the time, or else

money, and as a side-line financial relations between America and Europe. Some are surprised to hear that in England we are still paying a fifth of our earned incomes back to the state in tax. There, income tax does not affect you at all until you are earning more than £1,000 a year, and then only slightly. One said: "Ah! But during the war we had to pay through the nose. Why, we were paying an income tax of 85 per cent. Yes—sir." "Heaven!" said I, "that sounds a bit stiff. What! 85 per cent. of earned income back to the state?" "Oh, well," was the qualifying reply, "I mean 85 per cent. of all income beyond the first 1,000,000 dollars a year."

They don't give any quarter, these Americans. It is quite right we should pay our war-debts. It's ordinary business. Oh, quite, you agree; you have every intention of paying. Only, you did venture to hope—but still let that pass. Americans cannot get off the subject of money. They will look at you in blank surprise if you begin talking about a film which stirred you because of its admirable composition or the treatment of the theme. While you expatiate mildly they listen patiently, but they have the last word on the subject, "The public passed it up"—*i.e.*, it isn't worth consideration. But their mouths water and their eyes sparkle when you talk of a successful picture. And from a business point of view, why shouldn't they be pleased?

Actually, this state of mind is inevitable. No one can afford to gratify artistic ambitions, because there are so many financial folk, banks and individuals, who have invested in films and expect a good return. They take risks, of course, but American banks are much less conservative than ours, and if one or two go smash, it is not considered any more serious than a fishmonger

or an hotel going under. All the great banking houses—for example, Kuhn, Loeb and Co., and J. P. Morgan—are in the pictures up to the neck.

Americans work as hard as we do, I fancy, perhaps harder. No matter what time Mr. Loew goes to bed—and he is a great bridge-player—he is on parade at 7.55 every morning in the hall, and you must be ready to start by eight or be chaffed unmercifully as you emerge somewhat flurried from the lift. A fleet of cars are waiting to take you and the rest of the week-enders to New York, unless you happen to be in Mr. Loew's personal party of five or six. These go to the city by boat. We walk down through the grounds to the pier, where the launch is waiting. A few hundred yards away is J. P. Morgan's yacht. Directly we are inboard we cast off, and, as we leave the miniature artificial harbour, we go forward to the dining-saloon and eat our breakfast, served by a Japanese cook. And we have some appetite, we'll tell the world! As we sit in the stern-sheets and read the papers, we can watch all the teeming water traffic of New York: the gigantic lighters lashed to the side of grotesquely ugly tugs; the hideous coasting passenger vessels, that look like floating tenement blocks with a large stack in the middle; the smart motor-launches conveying other city men from their country-homes, who wave greetings to us. We see little of New York itself; it is wrapt in morning mist. In an hour we are at the yacht club's pier, and a taxicab lands us at the Loew building about "twenty after nine." While a coloured man polishes Mr. Loew's boots and shaves him, the business of the day begins, and it goes on until five or six in the evening in never-ceasing flow.

You get a good insight into the work of a great self-contained corporation in the first hour or so. Mr. Ford,

the motor-car king, controls his own coal and iron fields, smelts his own steel, grows and buys his own rubber, mines his own copper and lead. He won't be subject to the whims of middlemen and brokers. The film-business is being developed on similar lines. We have seen how the principal corporations produce, distribute, and to some (an increasing) extent exhibit their own pictures. Mr. Loew has his own carpet factory, where the miles of monogrammed Axminster required for the picture-theatres is manufactured; and his own electric sign factory, where necessary work can be performed without a moment's delay. One large building is entirely devoted to the assembling of all the music, and band-parts for the numerous orchestras.

Every branch of the industry has its head and offices in the main building, and the principals all bring their suggestions and grievances to Mr. Loew's panelled sanctum, 100 feet above the roaring canyon of Broadway. The theatre chief protests that the distributing chief is charging him too much. The distributor retorts that the theatres are not run efficiently, or they could afford to pay better prices. The theatre chief says he will go to other firms for his programmes, and any way this year's output is not as good as last. Is the distributor losing his sense of what the public wants? Of course, he is a "regular fellow" (*i.e.*, a good sort), but as a man of business—enough said!

Mr. Loew's dulcet tones restore harmony principally by the expedient of compromise, and the machine continues to revolve. There are endless discussions on the new picture-theatres, plans to be passed, circumstances to be considered, the actions of rivals to be counterbalanced, more existing buildings to be equipped with refrigerating plant to combat the summer heat—all the business of pleasing the public, making them

hand over their money, and giving them something worth while in return.

There is one other aspect of the personalities in the film-business I must mention, the fact that almost all the principals, executives, and players are European-born. There seems to be something in America which enables a man to make pictures, when he does not succeed in his own country. I expect it is largely a matter of money. I have heard it said that 75 per cent. of film-directors fail to make good, which means that much money has to be spent in experimenting with all sorts and conditions of men. No one in Europe has money to spend in that way.

Mr. Zukor, the head of Paramount Famous-Lasky, was born in Hungary, and he often goes back to his native village, which turns out to meet him in holiday mood. Mr. William Fox, head of the Fox Film Company, is also Hungarian-born. The Schenck brothers—Joseph, president of United Artists, and Nicholas, executive vice-president of Loew Incorporated—came from Russia. Mr. Carl Laemmle was born in Germany, and was naturalised in America in 1888, since when he created the Universal Film Corporation, and built Universal City, the studio with the largest area in Hollywood. Mr. Robert Lieber, until recently head of First National, who built their magnificent new studios at Burbank in the hills north of Hollywood, is also German-born. The only outstanding figure among the executives who was born in America is Mr. Loew, whose forebears were immigrants? His father was a waiter in the Bowery, and, like Zukor, he started life as a fur salesman.

Then look at the players. Charlie Chaplin and his brother Sydney, of course, are London-born, Miss Mary Pickford is Canadian, Miss Pola Negri is Polish,

Eric von Stroheim is Austrian, Adolphe Menjou is French. Emil Jannings and Miss Lya de Putti, now working in Hollywood, are German; the parents of the Barrymore brothers and sisters were Irish (John was born in Jersey); Miss Greta Nissen, Miss Greta Garbo, and Miss Anna Q. Nilsson are Scandinavian.

Here are a few more stars and well-known players who hail from Europe: the Schildkrauts, H. B. Warner, Lars Hanson, Miss Dorothy Mackaill, Ronald Colman, Miss Norma Shearer (Canada), Miss Renée Adorée, Percy Marmont, Victor McLaglen, Ralph Forbes, and Alec B. Francis. Miss Dolores del Rio, of "What Price Glory" and "Resurrection" fame, is Mexican. Valentino was Italian.

Then look at some of the directors. Victor Seastrom and Mauritz Stiller are Swedish; Herbert Brenon, Sydney Olcott, Rex Ingram, Frank Lloyd, Edmund Goulding, and J. Stuart Blackton are British; Erich Pommer is German, Samuel Goldwyn also; Buchowetzki is Polish; Christiansen, Danish; the Christies came from Canada; Charles Rosher, one of the best camera artists in America, was once apprenticed to Speaight in Bond Street.

CHAPTER VIII

PUBLIC AND PUBLICITY

PUBLICITY is in the American's system. He practises it for his business and himself, reacts to it, and is generally more impressionable than Europeans. It is largely because he is only interested in new things and new ideas, and presumably a thing would not be advertised if it was old. And the American obeys the advertisement. When the cable companies say, "Don't write, telegraph," the New Yorker and the San Franciscan obey meekly. They start their telegrams, "Dear So-and-so," and end "sincerely, So-and-so," just as if they were writing a letter.

Everybody advertises today — even Mr. George Bernard Shaw. He is the best publicity agent the world has ever known, because he keeps it all on so elevated a level. Twenty years ago his plays were damned by both intellectuals and fools, but he never lost confidence. He kept on telling the world that Bernard Shaw's brain was the greatest ever. He kept on writing postcards in the style which the American publicity-man dubs "snappy pars," saying that he had no time to think as other people think, no intention of eating or drinking what other people ate or drank, or of reading or writing what other people read or wrote. He kept on informing all and sundry that Bernard Shaw's plays were good.

Now the public have accepted him wholly; not merely "Fanny's First Play," or "Arms and the Man,"

but all his plays, not excepting five-hour stretches of "Man and Superman." There are thousands of plays that have been written which the public ought to have liked and didn't. They ought to have liked all Mr. Shaw's plays, but they didn't until he gradually forced them to accept what he said as gospel truth. He "plugged" Bernard Shaw as no American jazz artist ever plugged a song or a tune. What he doesn't know about the public mind wouldn't go on one of his postcards.

Well, that is the American film-man's method. Advertising is carried out on a much larger scale there than here, and on more subtle lines. It is not enough to slam a double-crown on the corner of an empty house. Hoardings are extremely dignified affairs, neatly pillared, corniced, and painted, and fully illuminated at night. In the small cities real-estate men, who have bought corner sites with a view to waiting for the value to rise, let them out to a contractor, who erects hoardings in the shape of obtuse angles, spread-eagled across the site, and subtended by patches of neat green turf, decked out with flowers and shrubs.

We are gradually learning to beautify the hoarding, because the public are more likely to take a look at it when it is ornate, just as they are attracted by the moving electric sign more readily than by the plain immobile announcement. An American film-man often classifies a good and a dud exhibitor by the nature of his electric signs. A picture-theatre manager said to me one night on Broadway, "We'll give that place a miss: its electric signs don't move; the house is dead any way," and he pointed at a large theatre contemptuously.

Film-folk spend much money on advertising and more on exploitation. Apart from poster and hoarding advertising, the public is reached mainly through the

newspaper, the cost of this advertising being borne by the picture-theatre owners. The producing companies rarely advertise in the ordinary newspapers, though they take space in the trade papers. The great size of the American newspapers helps. In the United States there is one picture-theatre to every 6,500 persons (the proportion here is 1 to 12,000), and the number of new houses increases steadily. That means there is a big public ready to read about the film. The newspapers recognise the importance of the film in the daily life of the people, and there is scarcely a paper in the fair and large sized cities that does not contain a whole page daily devoted to the pictures. Photographs of players and film-directors deck the pages, and large advertisements of the fare at the picture-theatres are offset. The huge New York papers are equally favourable to films. The *New York Times*, for example, has two or three film-pages in the supplement devoted to amusements every Sunday. The lesser cities follow suit. Though Los Angeles has a population of only 1,250,000, the main Sunday paper contains over 200 pages, and the daily evening paper has about thirty-six. Both have their quota of film-news. The largest Sunday newspaper in London (the *Observer*) has only thirty-two, and no London evening paper has more than twenty on the average. Naturally, films hardly get a look in in England.

In addition to the regular film-feature, it is not uncommon to run special film-articles on other pages, and sometimes one finds two different half-column accounts of the same event on separate pages, on the principle that if you miss it in one place you will see it in the other. The publicity man's job is simple. With so much space at his disposal the film-editor admits much "stunt copy," boosting a player or a film,



United Artists.

RUDOLPH VALENTINO AND VILMA BANKY.

In "The Son of a Sheikh."

accounts of how someone won through to glory on the screen, and of the risks that this or that person ran in the service of art. I am surprised to find how much publicity matter even the New York papers print.

Too little criticism of films is included, and too much blather. The average American newspaper is much keener on displaying the film's dirty linen, or digging up some scandalous occurrence concerning a film-player, and hammering the details into the public ear with all the exaggerated technique of which it alone, of all the world's newspapers, is possessed, than on seeking to improve the quality of film-entertainment. The public is worked up into a frenzy of excitement over the alleged amours, divorces, quarrels, money-earning capacities, and amusements of the film-folk, until, when a big film comes along, an entire romance, true or false matters not at all, has been woven round every personality in it, and the public go to see the picture, not because it is good drama or good comedy, but because Miss So-and-so has been married five times. That is what is known in America as "the personal touch" in advertising.

When Rudolph Valentino "lay in state" in New York (it is strange how the democratic American is always using terms of a regal flavour; he talks of the "boot-legger king" or the "dope queen"), there was a riot, twenty persons were injured, the windows of the undertaker's were smashed in by the crowd, and unbreakable glass had to be put in the lid of the coffin to prevent ghouls stealing souvenirs from the body.

At the back of newspaper publicity are vast exploitation campaigns. Fake copyright actions are brought in the law-courts. When a film is put into production for which special exploitation is desired, it is arranged that the author of a similar story shall injunct the

company and the author of the story being used. The newspapers "run" the incident, giving all sides of the case with photographs, and the case is either settled before going into court, or after a few days' hearing. Expensive, but otherwise unpurchasable publicity! It is not considered improper. It is merely good business; a film-director who had had some experience of the procedure told me that it was considered to be a capital stunt to get a good Press on a fake action, and comparatively easy, as contempt of court rules, which protect the litigant in England against his case being prejudiced, do not exist in America, and the comment possible is unlimited.

I am not arguing in favour of these methods of exploitation. I am merely stating the facts and showing how publicity pays. So fast does the publicity man work that you can never tell in your morning papers what is real *bona-fide* news and what is publicity stunting. Much of the method employed is unscrupulous, the end justifying the means. The smallest incident in the studio is seized upon and vamped up into a front-page "story" with "black" headlines, and so great is the popularity of some of the stars that film-happenings often take precedence of political events of the first magnitude.*

The star-system is kept alive by the "personal appearance" business. New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago are specially subject to stellar invasions, when the first night of the run of a film becomes an occasion, and the leading light appears on the stage, makes a speech, or takes part in a prologue. In Los Angeles the "stars" and "featured players" (*i.e.*, those quite

* Compare the Lindbergh flight. Colonel Lindbergh had the front page of the New York papers all to himself for seventeen consecutive days.

famous actors and actresses who have not been "elevated to stardom") are kept constantly on the run outside the studio by the publicity department attending "premières," civic functions, and the ever-popular bathing beauty parades.

The rendezvous is one of the Pacific beaches, and hundreds of girls parade on the sand in bathing costume to have their legs and arms measured, and their *tout ensemble* appraised by a committee, which will include at least a couple of movie-folk. These parades are held about once a month, and the girl who survives most of the ordeals is proclaimed "Miss California" (or "Miss Chicago," if it be a Lake Michigan beach), and wears during her year of office a band across her bathing costume, proudly proclaiming the momentous fact to an admiring city. The facts are "featured" largely in the papers.

I have always been surprised that British film-folk do not get into closer touch with the newspaper owners. Mr. Randolph Hearst, who owns uncountable newspapers and magazines in the United States, is much interested in film-production, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, one of the "big three" units, distribute his Cosmopolitan Pictures. His papers are well disposed towards the film-business.

As far as I know, the only newspaper proprietor in England interested in the films is Lord Beaverbrook, who owns the English Pathé Frères, and is said also to have other interests. It is not, perhaps, without significance that the *Daily Express* is the only paper in London which devotes space to films every day in the week as a regular feature. Obviously, a newspaper proprietor who is interested in the film-business is going to be sympathetic to the movies in his columns. Mr. Gilbert Frankau tells a story of a man who said to

Mr. Hearst: "I suppose there's nothing really in motion-pictures?" "There's several millions of mine in it," was the laconic and somewhat gruff reply.

The pre-eminent difference between our attitude towards films and the American's attitude is that to us it has been a second-class business in which a few people who have made money in other businesses become interested, and to him it is "big business," which has to be put over just as thoroughly as any Wall Street deal. Hence the combination of production and exhibition under one hand. Hence the immense size of the movie public. Go into any West End picture-theatre here in the early afternoon, and you will see arid wastes of empty seats. In the height of a torrid summer the eight or nine large picture-theatres in a row between the Forties and Fifties on New York's Broadway will be packed to the doors by 2.30 in the afternoon, many of them having already given morning shows to some of New York's quarter of a million night-workers.

The "big business" attitude also brought about the employment of the ex-minister of state whom I mentioned, Mr. Will Hays, at a huge salary (about six times as much as the British Prime Minister) to represent the producers and distributors. His job is to ensure that picture interests are safeguarded at Washington, to keep a good tone and raise the status of the picture business, to answer all unfair criticism of business methods, to obviate scandals and prevent the filming of stories which would bring pictures into disrepute as a family entertainment, to be a powerful mouthpiece of the corporate will of the film-industry.

Mr. Hays does not do very much more than talk, but that is what the film-people want him and pay him to do. From his Fifth Avenue office come forth pronounce-

ments which sound as significant as the edicts of Congress, and they lend dignity to the industry. His is a name to conjure with. When the entertainment tax was reduced in America, the only people it benefited were the exhibitors and the film-public. All prices up to a dollar were declared tax free. Well, you can't get into any good New York theatre for a dollar. Who will say that the Hays organisation had nothing to do with managing this piece of wire-pulling?

In British countries every attempt to give the trade a corporate policy fails. Every time producers, renters, and exhibitors come together they begin fighting. There is no authoritative expression of will, no policy, nothing but gratification of personal wishes and ambitions. The result is that the film is the butt of every crank and self-appointed critic. It is the whipping-boy who bears the wrath of every pompous magistrate and reformer. Even the urchins in the street use it as a cloak for their sins. "We saw it on the pictures," they say, when caught stealing apples or tying a tin can on a cat's tail, and the Bench wags its ears and mumbles in its beard about dangerous modern inventions and the need for strict Government supervision.

Does one ever hear of an official representative of the trade trying to ferret out the truth of these vague charges? Does anyone ever examine an individual case and publish the results to the world? No one bothers, and so the trade occupies a position of second-rate importance. I don't want American publicity methods here. I only want the trade to recognise that its obligations to the community are vital. It is taking up the leisure time of the masses more than any other agency. Yet it does nothing to make its position respected.

The littleness of the responsible film-man in this

country is positively tragic. He has no national or international sentiment. His representatives (if, indeed, there be any direct representatives) in Parliament and municipal councils are inarticulate and ill-informed, and the questions put to the Government are allowed to fall from the lips of men who do not enjoy the respect of fellow-members. "That's the sort of person who speaks for the film-trade, you see; that's the kind of man to whose care we entrust the entertainment of our children."

And all the trade can do in reply is to "view with apprehension" the attempts made by the Government to interfere in private trading. The British film-trade deserves all that is coming to it and more, unless it pulls itself together. It has not begun to understand the elements of good publicity, good advertising, and corporate action. We do not need to copy the more flamboyant methods of the Americans. We ought rather to evolve a scheme of our own. But we ought to be sure that the trade shall secure attention when it seeks to ventilate an opinion.

CHAPTER IX

AMERICAN PICTURE THEATRES

ANY examination of the American film-industry must include a survey of the picture-theatre system, for it is the public patronage of the movies which ensures the stability of the business. The essence of American showmanship in the cinema is that the public consists of kings and queens to whom everyone connected with the building pays homage. The least important patron can call on the willing service of half a dozen attendants immediately he has paid his money. Frankly, I felt that this kowtowing business was carried too far, almost to a point where dignity disappeared. It is all very well to be given polite service, but no one wants servility.

The British exhibitor often goes to the other extreme. If you stand for a moment in the entrance to a London cinema, ten to one someone will look you up and down as if you were an undesirable person only fit to be moved on. And London box-office clerks are not the sweetest-tempered people in the world. How can they be, seeing most of them are overworked? Have you ever looked inside a box-office and seen the array of half a dozen telephones that the clerk has to manipulate? We are all in favour of a certain amount of pleasantness from the box-office when we pay our money, for we are taking a mighty big risk. Suppose we do not like the show, we can't go back to the box-office and say: "This is a dud show. Give me back my money, and I'll come again when you've got something better."

There are many box-office keepers who do not understand the first principle of salesmanship—pleasure in selling you something. We are driven often to suppose that the picture is as dismal as the man or woman who takes our money. Consider what an easy job the manager of a large London or provincial city cinema has. His principal competitors are out-of-date, uncomfortable stage-theatres. The public pays 1s. 6d. for the privilege of sitting on a backless board in the gallery of many a London theatre, from which he can neither see nor hear what is going on in the well down below. The new cinema by now ought to have compelled all the old theatres to shut up shop. The theatre is never going to be killed by the cinema or by broadcasting, public dancing, or any other agency. Drama is far too vital a part of our environment not to be expressed continually in stage form. But out-of-date drama and out-of-date theatres ought to be playing no part in public life, and if the cinema had been alive in this country it would have collared all their patronage by now.

The American exhibitor is better aware of his responsibilities, and his desire to please his public is almost pathetic. At all costs he intends that the public shall be comfortable. He anticipates his patrons' every wish, furnishes the theatre regardless of cost, and gives them the best entertainment he can procure. More important, perhaps, he impresses them with display. The American's idea of display may be loud and often inartistic, but it is conceived with a purpose, the greatest attraction of the greatest number. And it is all carried out in the grand style. Rates and taxes are lower in America than here, and so the ground charges are less. The picture-theatre, therefore, occupies a very large site. It is not circumscribed with

annoying restrictions as in London, where nothing may be superimposed on top of the actual picture-theatre.

In New York the theatre or cinema is merely part of a large building. Thus the Loew State at Seventh Avenue and Broadway has about seventeen storeys of offices on top of it. The new £3,500,000 Paramount building almost opposite contains a lavishly equipped theatre on the ground floor and in the basement, with twenty-six storeys soaring above it. The whole of the street-level frontage is always devoted to shops, the rent from which is usually reckoned to counterbalance the theatre's overhead charges.

It is perfectly obvious that if you build a new theatre in London at a cost of £250,000, a rent of at least £500 a week must be obtained to secure a primary return of 10 per cent. on investment; and on top of that rent has to be added depreciation account, rates and taxes, and running expenses, before one begins to think of the cost of the entertainment. No wonder the London theatre question is difficult.

It is a literal fact today that a new theatre standing on a piece of ground alone and unsupported cannot pay; at any rate, with building costs as high as they are at present. Compare the ground-plan dimensions of our central London theatres and some of the huge palaces in America. The Up-Town at Chicago has a vestibule into which the whole of the Capitol block in Haymarket could be put comfortably, and the space is used simply as a lining-up place in which the patrons buy tickets or wait for their friends. There is all the spaciousness of a cathedral together with the garish splendour of over-ornamentation beloved of the populace. A gallery hung round the vestibule is approached by flights of carpeted steps, and beyond is a further promenade from which doors lead into the 5,000-capacity auditorium.

Few new picture-theatres are built to hold less than 3,000, the principle being that it costs little more to run a large theatre than a small. Moreover, the public likes large buildings, and the prices can be reduced in order to keep them full, if the demand slackens at any time.

Let us follow Abie and Rosie, two characteristic young picture "fans" (fanatics), into one of the large cinemas in New York or Chicago. It is a terribly hot day. With true Western lack of sun-lore, both our friends wear as little clothing as possible and allow the rays to come into contact with their skins. They are parched and dried by the heat and overpowered by the humidity. The atmosphere is crushing, almost unbreathable. Filled with ice-cream, they have managed to get through their day's work in their oppressive offices, badgered by short-tempered bosses, and enduring only by supreme efforts the rush and turmoil, and noise and dust.

Then at last they are free. They leap in the express lift, which shoots down twelve storeys at a rush, and discharges them on to the burning "side-walk." The temperature is about 92°. Shall they swim? No, the water's not cool enough. Can they face a trip home in the subway yet? What, at rush-hour? They are not feeling heroic, and have no desire to see their clothes ripped off their backs; they are not in fighting mood, and none but the fighters survive the subway.

No, it is they for the movies, and off they go. The atmosphere on the pavement gives them a final flush, burning them as they feel the effect of a short walk from the office. A uniformed attendant opens the swing door, and Abie and Rosie are greeted with a drop in temperature from 92° to 74°.

Refrigeration! The whole of the interior of the

theatre is cooled by iced air generated by a £25,000 apparatus in the basement, and pumped into every corner of the building at the cost of £700 a week. Imagine the amazing, instantaneous, electrical effect on our young friends. They straighten up, smile, and look pleasant, feel that life is worth living again, and prepare for the movies as the heaven-sent harbinger of a couple of hours' happiness.

Inside the vestibule cool fountains are plashing against marble nymphs and mosaic walls. Flowers decorate, soft lights illumine, thick carpets ease the foot. A corps of attendants—ushers, or “receptionists,” they call them—fresh-faced boys of sixteen or seventeen, smartly uniformed, stand in a line near the box-office waiting to direct the honoured patron within. These lads are drilled every morning with military precision to stand to attention, to relax without lolling, to move without awkwardness, and to speak without offence. The “captain” of the corps details one to escort Abie and Rosie upstairs, and with courtly graces, worthy of an eighteenth-century withdrawing-room, he bows them forward into the “mezzanine.”

The “mezzanine” is as essential to the picture-theatre as the film. It is a long apartment, 90 feet or so, built in elaborate style, marbled pillars, decorated arching roof, mirrored walls and cut-glass electric chandeliers, enormously thick carpet on the floor, and all round the walls vast divans and luscious arm-chairs, into which Abie and Rosie sink with a sigh of content. There they sit comparing the quality of the silk stockings of their counterparts across the salon, and waiting for Pat and Sheila as comfortably as if they were in a private suite in the Biltmore or the Ritz-Carlton.

It is their club without their even asking for it. They paid their money for the movies, and all this

wonder is thrown in free. Now and again a discreet, hatless young man walks quietly through and disappears through one of the mirrors. He is probably the manager going to his private office. But it would be as much as his job was worth to manage so as you'd notice it. Gradually the party collects itself and moves towards the auditorium.

At the door more attendants meet them. If the film is a story of Argentine adventure, the ushers are garbed in wide-brimmed beaver hats, large black velvet plus-fours, high boots, coloured neckwear, and cattle-whips. If Sheik-business is afoot, they may be Foreign Légionnaires, and the programme girls may veil their beauty with a yashmak. Thus are Abie and Rosie prepared spiritually for the great adventure they are to undergo in the darkness beyond.

As they enter the soft gloom, the usher consults a large brass plate on the wall studded with tiny bull's-eye lights, red and white, by which he may tell what seats in his section are occupied and which are vacant for Abie and his girl. There will be no stumbling in and out of rows looking for two seats side by side; no shouting to find out if "that seat with your wrap on it is occupied"; no disturbance. Abie will be taken direct to D 7-8, and there remain till he and Rosie are satiated with sentiment and humour.

Seated at last, and holding Rosie's little hand—no fear of it getting sticky in this cool atmosphere—Abie gives himself over to marvelling at the grandeur of this interior. The curtain is down, and a soft starlight pervades the theatre; the roof seems veritable sky, with the sparkling Milky Way glinting athwart it. One could almost swear a star twinkled and moved swiftly across the firmament. The two wings of the auditorium flanking the proscenium are of different

design. On the right are the hanging gardens of Babylon, the graceful cupolas and minarets of an Eastern palace against a pale blue Oriental dusk.

Abie has heard that this massive, realistic edifice houses the organ which is naturally (in every picture-theatre) the largest in the world. At any rate, the roar of 32-foot pipes seems to emanate through the lighted palace windows, as the organist, who has ascended mysteriously, manuals and all, out of the depths of the orchestra-well on to a level with the stage, makes the instrument speak his will.

Rosie's eyes travel across the massive proscenium arch subtended by the huge tasselled curtain to the left of the auditorium, which is built to resemble an Eastern city nestling, as it were, at the foot of the great palace on the right. The roofs of the distant houses form the top outline, and closer in the latticed casements suggest mystery and intrigue. Rosie squeezes Abie's hand. The organ reverberations have died away scarcely noticed, the organist has sunk into his tomb, and the orchestra, thirty strong, have slipped into their positions, taking over and merging into the melody from the organist as he still plays it. The change is scarcely perceptible until the brass roars.

The lights are dimmer, the Eastern city is in azure night, the curtain is still down, but a faint green light, transmitted from high up at the back of the auditorium, where the projection-room is placed, is playing near the stage and on the orchestra. It increases in the centre and becomes concentrated on the woolly head of the band leader. He slowly turns round. His pale features and long black locks are quivering with emotion as he racks the listeners with some Oriental lament, some fatalistic dirge, some super-Woodforde Finden. The immense concourse of spectators is sucked up in the

uprush of sentiment. Rosie's heart throbs in reaction; her spine—only now acclimatising itself to the drastic change of temperature—shivers from the stress, partly physical and partly mental, as the violin's crescendo rapes her soul—the music is agonising.

The orchestra joins in with their leader towards the end of his solo, the colour of the limes cast on them changing in alleged conformity to the music's mood, and another "unit" of the programme is over. Immense applause for the favourite leader, who, visibly torn with pain, can scarcely bow his acknowledgments, but recovers surprisingly quickly (could you see him from the stage) when he turns back to the orchestra and prepares it for the "presentation," which follows forthwith. Freud has nothing on this pseudo-Russian fiddler.

The presentation is simply a dancing and singing number staged in a full set with curtains or scenery. It is not connected with the picture that follows, anticipatory prologues being out of date. The argument is that the picture must be strong enough to "stand up on its own." But the public likes a vaudeville or a dancing act with a group of girls posed and some songs, as long as it is not too long—a quarter of an hour at most. Then come the films—a topical, showing happenings of the day; a short comedy or an educational film; and the main feature, which will occupy about an hour and twenty minutes.

The entire performance takes about two hours and a half, and then Abie and Rosie find the show repeating itself, for all film-programmes continue without a break from about one o'clock till midnight; they collect themselves slowly and stroll sadly out. They are not hustled along by the management as soon as their show is over, but just take their time.

On the way they pause to admire the building. It is all constructed to impress. Sometimes a fairly consistent motif is maintained. Louis Quinze, or Oriental, but often the decoration is ludicrously bizarre, a weird medley of all kinds, monstrous architectural anachronisms, weird mixtures of Greek-Spanish, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian, Gothic, Ojibway, and late Bronx.

Niches in the walls contain grotesque statues illuminated with coloured lights. The staircases are bordered by rows of gigantic ornate pillars, supporting fantastically carved beams which have no utilitarian purpose. Masses of stucco are hurled everywhere in every conceivable shape, human and divine, vegetable and mineral. Everything may be painted in the colours of the pre-Reformation cathedral interior.

Often there is included a museum full of "antiques," or copies thereof. The legends do not imply that the antiques are anything but absolutely genuine. Thus, if you have a film laid in the time of the Borgias, you can go to the museum after it is over, and ten to one they will show you some of the armour "actually worn" by Alexander VI. Attendants will turn on the information tap, and leave it running as long as you can bear the chatter.

Here is a piece of the figure-head of the *Mayflower*. (Did it have a figure-head?) Here is General Robert E. Lee's sword-scabbard. Here's a little gingham gown actually worn by Topsy in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (just as if Topsy really existed); the picture is showing on the 13th prox. Here is a stone from the city of Troy—see "Helen, the Bad Girl Wife," next week. Here's the sombrero Tom Mix wore in "The Rustler of Red Gulch."

You see, there's nothing new under the sun. Five hundred years ago the mass-attention was attracted

and riveted on serious things by spurious relics. Today the common herd is sucked into the cinema by faked antiques.

The ushers are inordinately proud of their charge. In the Million Dollar Theatre at Los Angeles—rather an old building now, five years or so; you know this, because, if it was new, it would be called the Two Million Dollar Theatre—a smart young lad, got up like a musical comedy Ruritanian officer, declined my timidly proffered tip with the words: “No—SIR! it is a privilege to show you over *our* theatre”; and handing me a four-page circular describing the activities of the house, he plunged into a detailed description of the laundering of the air in the theatre, so that “our patrons” never breathed impurities; told me how many thousand electric globes outlined the contours of the building’s exterior; explained why “our theatre” was more successful than the rival outfit across the road; dilated on the unlimited attention bestowed on the public’s comfort; declared that he was learning the exhibiting business preparatory to becoming a house-manager; and said his mother lived once in the Brixton Road.

The prodigal expenditure to attract attention, the abandonment of all standards of artistic taste in building schemes except in a few instances, the large scale display, all are expensive experiments. But when the theatre is opened, practical business methods are employed. Every available inch of space is occupied by seats. The operating-room (booth) is banished to the back of the house just beneath the roof, though the best position for it would be on a level with the screen in the front of the circle, in order to make the beam of light from the projector to the screen as short and as horizontal as possible. But this plan would involve



Ufa.

MINIATURE WORK AT THE UFA STUDIO.

Note contrast with real train on right.



Ufa.

MOVING CAMERA USED FOR FILMING "METROPOLIS."

sacrificing space in the very centre of the house, for all the modern picture-theatres are built on two levels only. Even the Capitol in New York, which holds 5,300 people, has only ground floor and circle.

The ideal building has only one floor, and the best example I saw of this type was Graumann's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood. But, of course, it seats less people—1,800. In place of the circle the "booth" is carried forward over the heads of the back of the stalls, and the throw is ideal. This theatre, by the way, has the reputation of being tastefully decorated. The motif is Egyptian, and the interior maintains it unrelentingly. It is certainly a fine building, but even here so-called showmanship is not foregone.

If Mr. Graumann sets a high standard in his theatre he has also catered for his public, for the great unappreciative in other ways. At the Egyptian this procedure takes the form of "lobby display" on a large scale. Between the main street (Hollywood Boulevard) and the entrance to the theatre is a wide and long lobby space, which is usually filled with enormous models representing scenes in the films being shown. Thus the Fairbanks picture "The Black Pirate" was advertised by an enormous model of a sixteenth-century warship, and the Mary Pickford film "Sparrows" by a tumble-down hovel, where lived the little mother and her horde of children represented by wax figures modelled on the characters in the picture. A rather gruesome exhibit.

Presumably, the average film-goer must be attracted by this kind of advertising. Otherwise it would not be the custom in America and a growing habit here. But many of such stunts are extremely puerile, and one would have thought that the "Sparrows" effort would have driven people away rather than attract them to the

box-office, which all goes to show that the exhibitor's job is an interesting one, and the more he knows of mass psychology and the psychology of the different types of patrons that different films attract the more successful he is likely to be.

As a matter of fact, the Egyptian Theatre is so successful that it has only needed a dozen pictures in three years, and no doubt Mr. Graumann's Chinese temple of the film recently opened in Los Angeles will be equally successful. I suggest he takes the Taj Mahal as his next model.

CHAPTER X

NEW YORK

To the layman films mean Hollywood, Los Angeles, Californian sunshine. Actually, however, these names represent only a small part of the business, which could never exist at all, but for the golden life-blood which flows to it from New York. If you want to inspect the heart, mind, and brains of industry, apart from the technical processes of turning a story into a celluloid strip, you must study New York. Here the financial deals of which so much is heard are arranged, the general policy is determined, and the schemes of expansion are manœuvred.

It may seem strange to separate the two ends of the business by 3,000 miles, but two considerations supervene. One is that the film-man must always be near his financial base; that is inevitable in the case of a precocious infant industry. Secondly, New York is an extremely important exhibiting and exploiting centre, partly because of its wealth and population, and partly because all the big foreign buyers visit New York to study programmes and methods.

True to its self-assertive mode of life, the industry has planted itself firmly in the Times Square district, which corresponds to our Piccadilly Circus. Stand at the junction of Broadway and Seventh Avenue and look north, south, east, and west. In every direction there are large cinemas and the headquarter offices of the principal film-corporations. From early morning until

evening they are humming with activity. Practically all the cinemas form part of offices and have shops all round the ground level. The fact that we dispense with these methods of getting our rent back is one of the big surprises that greet the American when he visits London.

This Broadway is a loud, noisy thoroughfare. By day, a wild, scurrying jumble of humanity and motor vehicles; by night, "The Great White Way," ablaze with scintillating signs and winking luminous words. There is no need for arc lamps. It is as light as day. You should look down from above on it in the evening. It seems like a huge, flaming ravine, full of adventure, excitement, and soundless explosions of brilliant electricity.

On one side is the £3,500,000 Paramount building, containing vast areas of offices and a sumptuously equipped theatre—opened in December, 1926. With its unique position and soaring tower, it is a monument to the organising genius of two men, Adolph Zukor and Jesse L. Lasky, of the Paramount Famous-Lasky Film Corporation. Ten years ago Lasky and Samuel Goldwyn were trying to make pictures with a company named after the former. Zukor was making pictures with the aid of celebrated, famous stage and operatic actors and actresses—for example, Miss Geraldine Farrar. Goldwyn dropped out, and Zukor merged his Famous Players Company (as he had named it) with the Lasky "outfit." The firm was known as Famous Players-Lasky until 1927, when the title was changed to Paramount Famous-Lasky, Paramount being the title used by the corporation's distributing company. The company is now the largest in the world in all branches of the business.

Opposite the Paramount building at the junction

of Broadway and Forty-fifth Street is the Loew building, which houses the offices of Loew Incorporated, the owners of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the second largest film-firm. Of Marcus Loew I have already written. Both he and Mr. Zukor, who today are "thinkers in millions," have had their moments of great anxiety. Mr. Loew, after progressing by stages from fur salesman, property manager, owner of penny arcades, and controller of a circuit of variety theatres, to the unofficial title "The Little Napoleon of Small Time" (vaudeville), decided to make big pictures for himself. He will tell you he knew nothing of production, and there were some terrifying moments during which £1,500,000 in all were lost before Louis B. Mayer, his production chief, began to climb the arduous hill of success.

And over in Hollywood Mayer will tell you how the costly telegrams poured in from New York, and how he was answering the telephone at the rate of £4 a minute, urging his chiefs to hold on, hold on, and all would be well. Some tense excitement there was as the activities of the two producing units, Metropolitan and Goldwyn, which Mr. Loew had acquired, gradually began to mean something in credit cash. The strain told on the health of these two men, one in New York and the other in Culver City, Los Angeles, but they would have hated to have missed the excitement.

Let us get back to Broadway. Everywhere we see the film pushing the regular stage-theatre out of the best sites. It has even appropriated the plain title "theatre," or "theayter," as some of the film-folk pronounce it. They don't bother any more to speak of "picture-theatre," and the word "cinema" has never been incorporated in the American vocabulary. Within sight, then, are the Rialto, the Criterion, the New York, the Paramount, the Loew State, the Rivoli, the Embassy,

the Gaiety, the Colonial, the Mark-Strand, the Capitol, Warner's, and, largest of all, the Roxy. Partially out of sight in the Forties and Fifties, which cut Broadway and the Avenues, there are half a dozen other stage-theatres given over to films.

The Roxy is the biggest and most extravagant film-theatre in the world. Completed in the early days of 1927, it cost about £1,500,000, holds 6,200 persons, and took a gross of £64,500 in the first three weeks of its existence. It was built by Samuel Rothafel, one of New York's best reputed showmen, and known to all the trade as "Roxy." Hence the picture-theatre's title. Rothafel is a man with large ideas—the Capitol paid him £13,000 a year a little while ago to be its manager—and the programme he gives in this sumptuous "cathedral of the movies," with its orchestra of a hundred and its two grand organs, is calculated to "tickle" the imagination "to death."

Sometimes the film is the big attraction, sometimes it is ballet, or spectacle or vaudeville. There will always be some kind of film, for Rothafel sold the controlling interest as soon as the building had been exploited to William Fox of the Fox Film Company, who will use it as a stunt palace for his best pictures. But as I have indicated in a previous chapter, in America they do not leave the programme to look after itself. If some "unit" in the programme is weak, it must be strengthened or counterbalanced by some stronger "unit." It would be intolerable to run a theatre or a cinema to empty benches. You must always find something to "fetch 'em." If the film does not "get a hand"—that is, a clap or two—you must put something in that does. When the Paramount Theatre opened, they used a good, but not very popular film. So they promptly threw in Paul Whiteman's band at a cost of

about £1,200 a week to make the running. The first week's receipts, as a result, were about £16,000. "Talking-pictures" (vitaphone, movietone, phonofilms) are pretty sure cards as "added attractions."

Near the Roxy is the block which contains the offices of First National and United Artists, two more production units. Up a dozen floors you may come across the president of United, Joseph Schenck (husband of Miss Norma Talmadge), another of the film's big business operators. He is an indefatigable organiser, a tremendous worker, with great ambition, fierce determination, and the eye and build of a great infighter. He helped J. D. Williams to found First National, and then left to conquer new worlds. It was unreasonable that Allied Artists—Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D. W. Griffith—should be content with gilt-edged security; their pictures would sell anywhere and everywhere. Why not use them as the nucleus of a much larger organisation? Schenck turned Allied Artists into United Artists, a corporation designed to distribute the pictures of the gilt-edged four, and also the pictures of a new group, to include the Talmadges, Buster Keaton, and the others I have already mentioned. All should produce their own pictures, and Schenck would co-ordinate their activities and send the pictures round the world. Schenck would build theatres and gain control of others in which to exploit the pictures.

Joseph Schenck is a personality worth studying. He is a short man; so are Marcus Loew, Adolph Zukor, William Fox, and Carl Laemmle, but they make up for that with big ideas. I do not credit any of them with a pre-Raphaelite mentality, nor do they lie awake at night pondering the "plane-conjugations" of modern cubism. They are furiously direct, and willingly admit

that the only disturbing factor in their lives is a drop in receipts at their picture-theatres, a contingency that makes them study relentlessly America's economic position, of which the attendance at the cinema is a sure index. They live for the day, and at present the day is one of financial stability. One of the corporations collected \$15,000,000 in twenty minutes on Wall Street, a feat of which Mr. Charles Schwabe said the steel-folk were not capable.

When I was in New York, Loew Incorporated was building forty-three new 3,000-capacity picture-theatres in various parts of the country, in addition to retaining control of 300 or 400 others. Zukor, Loew, Schenck—a powerful triumvirate; and you wonder how closely they are knit, and how far their rivalry, that appears on the surface, is really serious. They are not, as might be supposed from some ill-informed sources, plotting the moral downfall of the British Empire, but they are business-men, whose responsibilities are too heavy to allow them to consider any other problem than how to make their business pay big dividends. And as a large proportion of those dividends are reckoned to come from Europe and the British Empire (Metro says it is 45 per cent. of theirs), they are not likely to offend our susceptibilities more than they can help. I rather fancy that if they did not think their English and German markets extremely important, they would retaliate on England and Germany for the quota legislation put forward by the Governments of those countries, which disturb free business exchange.

I am credibly informed that Hungary tried to exclude American pictures, whereupon, as Hungary was only a growing and unimportant market compared with other countries, it was informed that, if steps sharply contrary

to American interests were taken, the American houses would withdraw their pictures altogether from Hungary. Whatever the wisdom of this threat was, the effect remained that Hungary did not pursue its drastic national quota scheme.

The ramifications of this film-business are wide, and very naturally the chiefs rely on the solid security of real estate to guarantee their positions. Mr. Zukor, to quote one small illustration, in addition to all the producing, distributing, and exhibiting interests of Paramount Famous-Lasky, also owns his own theatre company, Charles Frohman Incorporated, which, with Gilbert Miller at its head, runs two or three theatres in New York and two in London, the St. James's (leased) and the Carlton. Incidentally, you never know that you may not find good film-material in the plays you stage.

The big firms' real-estate commitments are always increasing. Land values on the little island of Manhattan, on which New York stands, are gigantic, and there is much speculation. I believe real estate is the basis of whatever prosperity the show-people enjoy. Some of the out-of-date "neighbourhood" picture and play theatres away from Broadway, for example, are run simply as real-estate investments, with any sort of programme, until the land value rises. I know one or two which are owned by individuals who have handed them over to Loew or Paramount for nothing. The film-firms take what they can get by showing cheap pictures, and when the value of the site has risen high enough, the owner sells out.

Buildings date as rapidly as they are put up, and are then scrapped with little compunction. A twelve-storey building had recently been completed, when the site was bought by someone else, who thought it worth

while to "tear down" the edifice, though it had never been occupied, because it did not suit him, and erect a brand-new building in its place.

Being concerned with the erection of spectacular picture-theatres and offices in New York and all the great key-cities in the country, the corporation chiefs look at the pictures themselves from a different angle from the Hollywood executives. New York film-men are not specially interested in technique, in films *qua* films. Every picture is measured in terms of box-office value. It is not uncommon for a New York film-man to know little except the title about the detail of the actual picture he is selling. All he knows is the strength of its magnetism in the theatre. That is all he wants to know. A picture is not a live entity to him; it is a bartering instrument of a certain classified standard power.

Conversation with any of the departmental heads will show you that. Films apart from "junk," "shorts," and miscellaneous are roughly divided into "specials" and "features." Features are the everyday meals of the picture-theatres, without which they cannot keep going. Specials explain themselves with this qualification, that a special may very well be a "flop." It may fail miserably to "get over," and much disappointment may result. On the other hand, the special may be elevated into the "super" class, not from any artistic or technical value, but simply because of its drawing power in the picture-theatre.

A super need not, by any means, be an expensively produced film, while enormously costly pictures such as "Greed" and "Intolerance," which fail to please the public, are rated supers only in esteem. "The Big Parade" cost the comparatively small sum of £100,000, but it is indubitably a super, for it has run

the best part of two years at the Astor Theatre on Broadway at a 9s. (\$2.20) top price.

“ Ben Hur ” is also an undoubted super, though its enormous cost (£800,000 apart from extra payments to parties interested in the rights) makes it unlikely to net the gigantic profits earned by “ The Big Parade.” Other pictures certainly classified as supers are: “ Way Down East ” and “ The Birth of a Nation ” (both made by D. W. Griffith several years ago); “ The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ” (the success of which has secured Rex Ingram a *carte blanche* contract from Metro-Goldwyn ever since, though he has not since made by any means so successful a film, except, perhaps, “ Scaramouche ”); “ The Covered Wagon ” (James Cruze’s epic); “ The Ten Commandments ” (on the prologue of which Cecil de Mille spent £300,000, which necessitated him skimping the rest and ruining the brilliant opening with a ghastly, muzzy sequel); and, I think, both “ The Kid ” and “ The Gold Rush,” the two Chaplin masterpieces.

I fancy “ Vaudeville,” the German picture (known in America and on the Continent as “ Variety ”), ought to be put in the “ super ” class also, but many Americans might object.

Most “ specials,” before they do, and in the hope that they will, become “ supers,” are given a special run in \$2.20* (9s.) top-price theatres on Broadway, partly to advertise them, and partly to skim off the cream of the public—the people who will pay as much as that to see a film. If the picture will “ stand up ” fairly well to a \$2.20 run, it is a pretty good proposition, and it can be launched without more ado on the key-theatres. Or if it is something quite out of the ordinary —“ The Big Parade,” for example—it is “ road-shown.”

* Top price at such runs sometimes rises as high as \$4.

This means that it is sent on tour just as if it were a theatrical play, complete with orchestra, operators, advertising manager and business manager. A theatre (not a cinema) is specially hired in each large city, and the picture is shown at special (high) prices.

The ordinary exhibitor disapproves of this plan, because it cuts into his business, but the practice arose merely because it seemed to offer a chance of bigger returns than from the rentals that the ordinary exhibitor could pay.

The \$2.20 runs in Broadway theatres do not always pay, owing to heavy exploitation expenses. But the process continues, because a picture that has had such a run in New York has gained some kind of cachet, and will usually earn more in rentals all over the country. On the other hand, a big success like "Beau Geste," "Don Juan" (accompanied by the vitaphone synchronised music), or "What Price Glory" manages to make a lot of money for the owners during its \$2.20 run.

Speaking generally, however, the big receipts come from the "75-cent house." Except in the exploitation run cinemas, 75 cents (3s.) is the top price charged in New York (65 cents in most of the large American cities). The best-known 75-cent house in New York is the 5,000-capacity Capitol, which changes its programme every week—except under exceptional conditions. Occasionally it takes a \$2.20 picture when the special run is over, but as a rule it is given pictures specially intended for the 75-cent public. Each type of picture attracts a different public. The Capitol people rarely go to the \$2.20 house, and *vice versa*, and neither audience goes to the no less popular Loew's New York, where on the roof second-rate pictures are shown continually day and night at very cheap prices.

The New York regular picture-theatres, in making

75 cents the top price, reckon that moderate prices are the best recommendation for the entertainment. Seventy-five cents corresponds roughly to 1s. 6d. worth of purchasing power in England, which seems to indicate that 5s. 9d. and 3s. 6d., the corresponding prices charged in London, are too high. Many American picture-theatres could get more than 75 cents, but they do not increase prices for fear of offending their regular patrons. Indeed, most of the 75-cent houses reduce prices at matinées. Thus, the Capitol's matinée prices are: upstairs, 50 cents; downstairs, 35 cents. In the evening and all Saturday and Sunday the prices are: upstairs, 60 cents; downstairs, 75 cents. About two hours and a quarter is the length of the performance, and the house is open from about 11.30 in the morning till midnight.

A further example of the keen business methods is that if the house is full, and there is any standing room, the "standees," as they are called, have to pay *more* (not less, as in London) than those who secure seats. At one picture-theatre on Broadway in 1925 they had "standees" on fifty-six days. Another example of careful calculation of what the public will pay was supplied by Mr. Loew. In one of his theatres he reduced the admission price by 4 cents. The year's receipts were *increased* by \$86,000.

I believe that before long all cinemas in London which are not giving an extra-special picture will keep all prices down to 3s., if not half a crown. If the business is to be stabilised here as it is in New York, we must increase the number of our regular film-goers. There are vast sections of the population hardly touched by the film yet, and if we built up our audiences more rapidly, so much the more rapidly would our production grow. It is the fear lest the return shall

not be enough which deters the producer from working as quickly as he might, and the shortage of patrons means a limited interest in the personalities, stars and directors, of the native industry.

In New York, so keen is the competition, that a producing corporation which owns picture-theatres will actually shelve its own film, if it feels that the entertainment is likely to disappoint the regular patrons. Paramount's picture-theatres (known by the title Publix Theatres) take the best pictures they can obtain with which to attract audiences. They book a Paramount picture, because it may be good, not because it is a Paramount. If occasionally their own current picture does not "level up" to expectation, they book the best they can get of someone else's output. The exhibition side is as highly commercialised as production, for it is the financial success of the theatres which assures the stability of the producer.

Smoking is very rarely permitted in American picture-theatres. It is not considered an attractive amenity by film-audiences—more often the reverse.

CHAPTER XI

“ TO THE COAST ”

IF you go to “ the Coast ” in the summer you are in for a mighty uncomfortable journey. “ The Coast ” is the generic term used by picture-folk to denote California, the Pacific, Los Angeles, Hollywood, and the principal film-studios. The trouble about living in a miniature country like England is that you forget how big America is, and when you land in New York you are as far from Los Angeles as you are from London. By the time you do reach California you will have covered a clear 6,000 miles.

Let a discreet veil be drawn over the three days' journey from Chicago to Los Angeles in the summer. An old campaigner will tell you that your compartment can be kept perfectly cool by soaking a towel with ice-water and hanging it in front of the open part of the window, that part which has wire gauze outside. The hot wind will then be refrigerated before it reaches you. But it is a tiresome nuisance continually renewing the water.

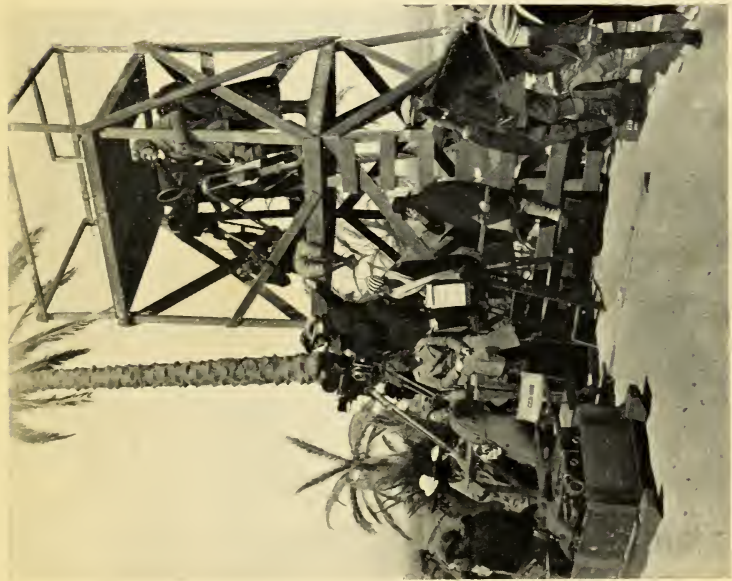
You were buoyed up by the excellence of the train's food-system and by the knowledge that there is always a cool breeze on “ the Coast.” So you just endured those three days in the intrepid spirit of your ancestors, and thought you were glad you were not making the journey in a car—that, as a limousine-car passed the train, raising a cloud of dust like a 9.2 howitzer shell-burst.

So you travel stickily moist and dust-begrimed

across the fertile corn-belts of Illinois and Missouri, where the mercury becomes jammed at 95° against the top of the thermometer, and the women in the train roll their stockings below the knee, sprawl over their pillows, relapse into humid lethargy, and don't care a cuss for anyone. Over the 7,000-foot-high Glorieta Pass you go through the Rockies into New Mexico, where automatically you draw up your blanket in the early morning; down on to the Arizona desert, where you become a confirmed ice-water addict. Now at last your roaring cataract of steel Pullman is eeling its way through the Sierra Madres, rushing madly between the irrigated orange-groves with the little stoves beneath the trees ready to guard them against sudden frost, and skimming past lines of tall poplars that recall the torpedoed culverts of Picardy.

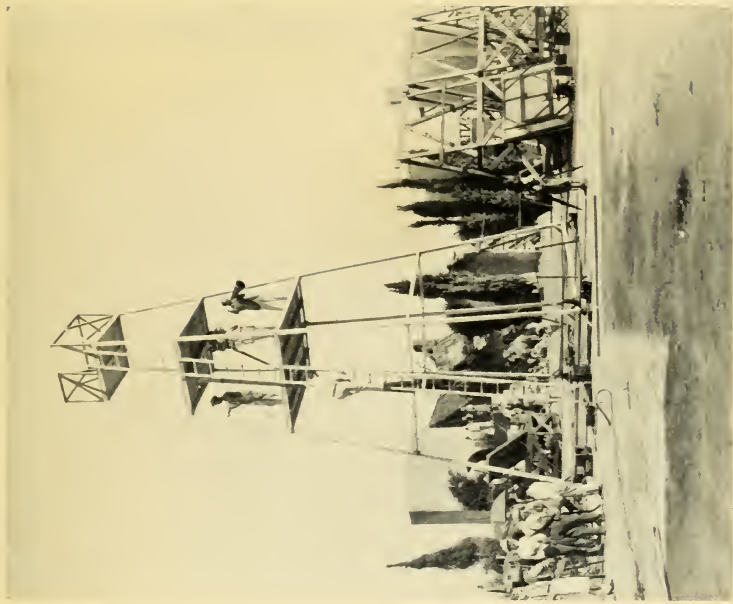
You are in California, and in a few moments the coloured train-porters will be changing their immaculate short white coats for the blue serge they wear when off duty, and with sibilant baring of shining teeth they will be dusting you down and making you as presentable as four days in a temperature of 105° without a bath will permit you to feel. Then is there a mighty collecting of hand-bags and suit-cases and grips, and black, gleaming hat-boxes with white or red pipings, on the vestibule of each train-car, and the wise travellers hand over the "baggage-checks" for their heavy stuff to the white train-conductor, who without more ado will arrange for its transfer from the station (*depôt* is more correct) to the hotel.

As is often the case in America, there is no need to linger wrapt in admiration of the *depôt*. It is a *depôt* (with the *e* sounded long), and that's about all, and the sooner you get into your taxi the better, for, you think, so much the sooner you will be in your bath. That is as



Paramount.

CECIL DE MILLE DIRECTING A SCENE IN
"THE TEN COMMANDMENTS,"



United Artists.

A DIRECTION PLATFORM.
Note electric cable and lamps on extreme left.

may be. Los Angeles, you imagine, is a decent-sized country town; you almost expect to see the hotel round the first corner. But you spend ten minutes zig-zagging through mean streets; halting while a Union Pacific train pursues with clanging bell its unfenced way across your path; and waiting for the automatic “ Go ” signal to let you cross Main and every other street.

You bump with hollow echoes through a tiled tunnel under a hill, and start your trek along Wilshire Boulevard, which seems nearly as long as Wiltshire is wide. After that you begin to know why the City of our Lady the Queen of the Angels, as the Spanish padres called it, occupies 416 square miles—more space than any city in the world except Chicago. And someone mentions casually that the Main Street you crossed is 42 miles long.

You see a warehouse bearing the legend “ Ducommun—Established 1849,” and your neatly ordered historical mind immediately summons up visions of the great Californian gold-rush. Why, there was no city then; only a few buildings clustering round the mission church which the Spanish fathers established sixty or seventy years before. Came then these hordes of lusty miners in their covered waggons, and tickled the beds of the rivers from San Francisco southwards, and those who failed turned to tilling the rich soil, which is still the staple business of Los Angeles.

You can see it all on a good film with more or less authenticity. But times have changed, and now it is not mines, or oil, or timber, or oranges and lemons, or preserved fruit, or all the multifarious occupations of a city that has increased in fifty years from 10,000 to 1,250,000, that you connect, as you should, with Los Angeles. It is the paint, and powder, and youth, and beauty, and insignificant celluloid, and marvellous

technical devices, and flowing streams of dollars, and juggling with emotions, and canning of laughter and tears, that they call the motion-picture business.

All this, perhaps, you think while your taxi skims past serried rows of well-shaped bungalow houses, along the jack-planed boulevards with their rows of thick-boled palms and grass borders tinted a brilliant green by perpetual watering, and yet you have not reached your hotel. But the driver seems to be putting out his left hand and diving through the hurtling streams of cars going citywards. Bump! and you are shooting up the car-and-flower-lined drive; you are two and a half dollars poorer; the bell-boy is leading you to the hotel office, where you snap up a cable or two. A moment later he is turning on your white-tiled bath, while a valet places a huge bowl of flowers on your dressing-table. Out of the window you can see the swimming-pool and three or four professional divers glinting in the sunshine, and nearer is a little round concreted pond, where little boys are bathing their brown limbs and sailing their uneven-keeled toy boats.

There are telegrams for you from the studios, long welcoming messages, for there is a complete art in writing a telegram that is friendly and not peremptory. You are to visit this and that studio, and cars are at your disposal; there are a score of hospitable people ready to place themselves at your beck and call. You rest coolly on your bed "calling up" this and that place, making appointments. You discover whence the London telephone service took the idea of printing the first three letters of the exchange's name in capitals; you learn to say "three four hundred" and not "three four double-o"; and if you say, "Are you there?" the operator will either laugh or ask you to "come again." Perhaps she will resent your apparently doubting her

full mental capacity and say, “ Yep ! all of me.” “ Hallo,” you find, is the only permissible mode of preface, or if you are a bit familiar, “ Hallo, sister.” She is certainly “ there ”; otherwise how could she be speaking to you ? “ Sorry, Miss—— Beg pardon, I should say, Ma’am.”

In view of your four-days’ incarceration in the train, dinner is a light matter of grape-fruit in a bath of broken ice, and clams, which turn out to be miniature oysters with a different taste; a suspicion of veal and leaf artichokes with butter and shrapnel-size potatoes; a delightful concoction of sponge, cream, and strawberries, and a *demi-tasse*. Americans all say *demi-tasse*, which means a small black coffee. It is sometimes the only French they know, except things like *dernier cri*, the second word of which is pronounced as if it were the first syllable in criterion.

The service is pretty good. There is an Australian head-waiter who fought at Gallipoli, and numerous French and Italian underlings, for Americans are too off-hand to act as waiters. Then, of course, there is nothing to drink. If you want to drink you have to “ fix ” someone or something; there must be a clandestine understanding with an agent who will introduce you to the bootlegger’s delights, and as you are only twenty miles from the sea, it can be and is done, as you will learn in time. Meanwhile, the hotel proclaims its integrity to all and sundry by printing on the menu card: “ Please do not embarrass the management by bringing intoxicating liquors into this room.”

That word “ embarrass ” is an inspiration. It suggests: “ Drink all you darned well like, but don’t ask us to square you with the dicks. Do your own dirty work.” Some hotels go even further, and request you not to leave bottles containing “ alcoholic sedi-

ment " in your bedroom. It's so bad for the morale of the domestics. "Sediment" gives an idea of the sort of wine and spirits you may have to put up with.

As a matter of fact, you will be told that public banquets are held in Californian cities, and, indeed, almost anywhere, at which wine and spirits are openly on the table, and the city fathers enjoy it and crack their glasses against those of the District Attorney and the Chief of the Police. There is a story that a rich man who has a home on the Californian coast which is famed for its cellar gave a large party one night to do honour to a distinguished visitor, none other than Mr. McAdoo. It appears that Mr. McAdoo is a stern prohibitionist, and when it was gently suggested that a cocktail would not be amiss, he declared that the law was the law, and he approved it. Glumly his host maintaining the traditions of American hospitality, deferred to the great man's wishes, and in consequence the most potent drink served was cocacola, which looks like the black-currant tea one used to take for a cold in the head, and tastes like diluted seccotine. The party is said to have failed as a party, but as an exercise in self-restraint it had probably a salutary, if only momentary, effect on the gayer souls from Santa Monica Boulevard.

After dinner—a pleasant stroll? Certainly not, unless you want to be devoured alive by mosquitoes. Ladies scratch in Los Angeles with less shame than in any place in the world. How can they avoid it, poor souls, while Sister Anopheles is exploring that part of the skin and calf that the \$8 stockings reveal rather than cover? Nor is the "mosquer" the only pest in Los Angeles. There is the cricket, which shrills from dusk till dawn—a ceaseless droning, louder than any chorus of frogs in Macedonia. You get used to the crickets after a time, but your first night they drive you

indoors, and anon you wander in on the dancing. Here all the film-world and others are amusing itself. An admirable band is playing; the room is decorated with palm-trees; a score or more couples (for is it still early) are flitting round the floor. Slim young men and marvellously shingled girls. They hope some film-magnate will see them and give them jobs.

None of them dress, most of them being in sports-clothes, plus fours, jumpers, and so on. They dance moderately well, and move gracefully. Later on, the place fills up and there are parties in various corners of the room. You see several celebrities, whom you know better on the screen. A few of the men wear dinner-jackets, but no one, except the waiters, a tail-coat. The American dresses in full panoply on three occasions only in his life:

1. To be married.
2. To meet the President of his country.
3. To be buried.

Most of the women's evening clothes are atrocious. Deadly reach-me-downs in gaudy, crushed taffeta; they would look poor at a Chelsea Town Hall two-bob hop. All American women look best in day dress, and, of course, the film and high-society folk buy most of their clothes in Paris or London, or from foreign houses in New York. Most men, too, with any sense of self-respect buy their clothes in London. Rod la Rocque comes to London at least once in every two years to see his tailor.

The drink restrictions drive the American to experiment in methods of quenching his thirst. Ice-water is drunk universally; there are taps supplying it in all hotel lounges, and even in the corridors and in coupés and “drawing-rooms” on the trains. You drink from a carton or a waxed envelope. At meals

some drink tea, others coffee, or mineral waters. Tea or coffee is almost always drunk iced. You have a tall glass filled to the top with ice, on which you pour freshly made boiling weak tea or strong coffee. You add cream or milk and sugar, and stir the concoction. When some of the ice has melted and the rest has reduced the liquid to a low temperature, you suck lazily through a straw. Your first impression of tea made this way is that you are watching a nice, clean river being polluted, but the tasted result is not unpleasant.

You smoke a lot. Cigarettes are cheap and good, but girls do not smoke as much as English girls in the same walk of life. It is bad for their complexions. Most of the men smoke cigars, which they chew horribly, but chewing-gum as a habit seems to be declining—at any rate, in Los Angeles. Perhaps it develops facial muscles, which spoil the perfect film-countenance.

A couple of professional dancers disport themselves in the unrestrained way favoured by Americans, some of the movements being ugly and ungraceful. It is after one o'clock and you are thinking of bed. The dancing is over, but outside in the hotel "lobby" you meet a "bunch" you know. "We're goin' upstairs a bit. Join us?" And so you go to a sitting-room on the first floor. A small table is loaded with bottles, half a case of champagne, whisky, brandy, gin, beer, and soda. Everyone is jolly. The door is shut, but not locked. The curtain is only half-drawn.

Someone not very skilful is uncorking a bottle. There is a big pop, the cork hits the ceiling, and the champagne reaches the opposite wall and the white shirt-front of one of the guests. He is almost drowned. Glasses circulate, and all are as gay as undiscovered naughty children. A tap on the door! Your law-abiding heart stands still, but it is only the night-

porter requesting courteously that the little window (the “ transome,” he calls it) over the door may be closed to prevent the noise disturbing the rest of the hotel. “ Sure, go right ahead.”

At two o'clock other folk come along and clear up the remains of the whisky. At three o'clock farewells are being said, and everyone fades away, but no one bothers to clear up the bottles and glasses. “ There are yet some few who cause serious embarrassment by openly displaying liquor on tables and in rooms, and by leaving empty bottles.” Nonsense ! what are the hotel servants employed for ? Embarrassment, indeed !

CHAPTER XII

LOS ANGELES AND HOLLYWOOD

LONDON drizzle, and mud-splashed silk stockings, steaming bus windows, and straphangers' umbrellas dripping on your knee in the tube! And 6,000 miles away in Los Angeles you leap out of bed to behold a brilliant sun in an azure sky reflected in the bathing-pool, and everywhere green turf being perpetually sprayed with water which rises up through pipes laid beneath. The Pacific breeze through the wire gauze outside the windows just disturbs the curtains. Masses of flowers in pots and hanging bowls, shrubs, pergolas, palms. In the distance ranges of misty, purple mountains fading into the sky. The air is already warm, and soon it will be hot. Waistcoats may safely be put away until you leave, except in the evenings, but there is all the trouble of stowing away all the oddments you normally carry in your waistcoat pockets.

A car is waiting at the main porch for you, they 'phone up to say. With a sheaf of letters and a camera in your hand, you are gliding coolly along Wilshire Boulevard in an open four-seater, and you have a chance to look round. Every plot of ground within sight that has not already a bungalow house on it has hoardings shrieking at you to buy, buy. Even those distant foothills beyond Cahuenga and Highland Avenues and the wide, dusty, grey areas over towards Culver City have been bought up by someone who is waiting for their values to rise. For this is a speculation-mad city. There are magnificent roads (leading to

Santa Monica and all the other sea-coast resorts), built not by the public authorities, but by the real-estate men, who own the land on either side, and hope by building a thoroughfare to attract purchasers.

You buy a hill, and hang on to it until it becomes more valuable. All the land between Los Angeles and the sea is thus portioned out and prepared for sale. The main roads are laid down full of pipes and wires, holding water and current and automatic telephone, ready for all contingencies, so that they need not be torn up every time a house is built. Some day Los Angeles will extend twenty miles farther west, and join up with the bathing-beaches. Nearer the city and in it all spare corner-sites are occupied by "gas-stations" (petrol pumps), with large gravel squares adjacent for parking, or by gigantic hoardings. But you feel instinctively that these fine corner-sites will not remain as they are for ever. As the population grows, the locations will be valuable for business premises and the present owners will sell out at a big profit.

The inhabited parts of the country round Los Angeles are like oases in a desert in summer. Irrigation and watering by sprays keeps the grass round the pleasant bungalows green, but elsewhere the hot sun dries it up and makes the country a desert. The surface streams cease to flow, and the city politics turn on the need for new mammoth reservoirs in the mountains to keep up the water stores and supplement the supply drawn from the great Mulholland Dam. The amount of water used is staggering, and the city is trying to establish its claim to dip into the Colorado River and the projected Boulder Dam.

The main avenues and boulevards are immensely long, and the numbering of the houses and lots runs into

thousands. Thus the Douglas Fairbanks studio is at 7,200 Santa Monica Boulevard. Chaplin has a house in the six thousands on Sunset Boulevard just north. It is seven or eight miles from the Paramount Famous-Lasky studios to Culver City, the home of Metro-Goldwyn films.

All streets cross at right angles, enabling the north-south and east-west traffic to be set in motion entirely by automatic "stop" and "go" signs in alternate waves. Woe betide you if you attempt to disobey. The pedestrian is supposed to cross when the traffic is held up, and is not allowed to "jay-walk" or dodge through. If an accident occurs through his crossing at the wrong time, he may be held entirely responsible for damage to the car by which he is run over. The signal alters about every ten or fifteen seconds, and a bell rings as the warning arm swings up to a horizontal position. The street railways (large tramcars), built by the late Henry Huntingdon, the great art collector, and motor-buses, huge affairs with six pneumatic-tired wheels apiece, are all subject to the traffic control.

"Speeding" or "stepping on the gas" is a punishable offence, though there is really no speed limit. Passing on the wrong side also is a heinous crime, and you are liable to be given a "tag" by a "cop" in return for the offence. The tag suggests that you may be summoned and fined, or something worse. But if you are smart, it is said, you can "fix" the police. If you know the right people and pull the right strings, you can, I am told, safely regard the tag as waste-paper. But it may cost you something. Better, however, than lose your right to drive a car. You positively cannot live without a car. One Englishman I met has six, and two chauffeurs. A few years ago, when he left England, he scarcely had his passage-money. Without

a car you are dependent on expensive taxis or on street cars, which take you hours to get anywhere, and how can you go down to bathe in the Pacific in the heat of the day? They say that two persons in every five in Los Angeles have cars. Imagine what the roads look like on a Saturday afternoon, when some of the 500,000 cars or so are whirring along the asphalt roads. Pity the pedestrian waiting for a street car. He has to stand in the middle of the traffic near the rails, his precarious refuge being a space marked by painted white lines and large metal studs on the road.

Architecture, domestic and commercial, is of rather a spurious nature. There are small bungalows to be seen with undulating roofs covered with dirty tiles to make it seem that the building has been standing hundreds of years. The Hal Roach studio looks like an English racing-stable. The Cecil de Mille studio has a wooden pillared frontage built like the old George Washington home at Vermont, said to be an exact replica. The principal craze is to build everything in the style known as "Spanish Mission"—white stucco with red-tiled roof—one of the features being the balcony running the length of the first floor or on the ground level, the idea being to keep the sun from the rooms within.

Many of the stars' homes are built on this model, and it is really very effective. The trouble is that film-folk like somewhat ornate designs and add to the simplicity of the old style, being often influenced by some scene or other on which they have worked in a studio. A run of pictures in which a certain type of setting has predominated is almost certain to be represented partially or wholly in domestic buildings erected about the same time. It is a curious trait, and creates a bastard style. Still, it is extremely satisfactory to find that a style exists.

The stars "get a big kick" out of designing or having their homes designed. Italian settings they like best, and space must be found on the piazza or in the garden for the inevitable bathing-pool. They are very keen on the outlook from the principal living-rooms, and spend much money on evolving an attractive setting between the balcony running round the house and the garden, and hiding from the visitor the hideous oil-derricks, which are blots on the sky-line. The houses are spaced very widely apart in the outlying districts, such as Beverley Hills, and the distances one travels through the thoroughly "town-planned" garden suburbs in a car when paying a call, are simply prodigious.

The business quarter of the city is much the same as any American city, except that there are no skyscrapers, presumably because it is in the earthquake zone. There are actually large, quite congested areas which are a great contrast to the wide open spaces of Hollywood and the boulevards running south and west.

The week-ending craze is universal. Everyone packs into his or her car on Saturday and travels to one of the little seaside places between Santa Barbara, Venice, and the Mexican frontier at Tia Juana. There they pass the time between the tennis or golf-course and the sea. Bathing-clubs abound, except at the more primitive places. Large pavilions are erected at high-water mark, and a portion of the shore is reserved for the use of the members. Large umbrellas and little tents are set up on the sand, and there you bask languidly in the sun between your dips. There is always a fairly good sea running, but the temperature of the water is almost too warm for a North European. Even on a cool day you never have to catch your breath.

Most attractive of all is the sea-breeze, which tempers the heat of the sun in a cloudless sky. It is an ideal, lovely climate mainly because of the breeze. And, of course, it is a climate that invites you out of doors, whether you motor or watch the "ball game" (baseball). And I mention outdoor recreation in order to bring you to Hollywood Bowl, which is a kind of modern theatre of Epidaurus. It is a vast natural amphitheatre in the northern foothills, where concerts are given right through the summer. One night, when I went up there, Mr. Eugene Goossens was conducting. It was a concert I shall not easily forget.

Your seat costs you 50 cents (2s.), and you approach the Bowl up Pepper Tree Lane through a small public park at the back of the stage. Every road and track is a car-park, for there will be 20,000 people here tonight. The Bowl has been known to hold 35,000. The auditorium is brightly lit with electric light, and the stage is in the shape of an enormous scallop-shell standing on its straight edge. The orchestra is tuning up. The audience is pouring in through the entrances. The air is still and warm; scarcely anyone is wearing a coat. There is a ceaseless buzz of conversation, interrupted by a programme boy chanting "Soft seats—only a dime," and suddenly checked as the conductor appears, bows, and is received with loud applause.

As he raises his baton a series of remarkable effects is achieved. A magical silence is induced, which is broken only by the chirping obligato of the crickets. The auditorium is plunged in darkness by the operation of a single switch, and instantly, as if by the same action, a million stars are lighted in the sky. Finally, the rays from numerous cars' lamps left burning near the road at some distance from the auditorium cast

up into sharp relief the half-circle of low foothills, which take on the shape of ponderous, ghostly giants sitting in the middle distance, and waiting for the music to begin.

Then from the dazzling heart of the stage float out the familiar strains of the overture to "The Magic Flute," and the concert has started. Incidentally, Mr. Goossens chose a very good programme, for four of the items were new to the Bowl — Schumann's Rhenish Symphony No. 3 in E flat major; the Children's Games Suite of Bizet; the first series of orchestral fragments from Ravel's "Daphnis and Chlœe"; and Arthur Bliss's Polonaise.

So you see Los Angeles and Hollywood is not so entirely wrapped up in films and film-making that it has no time for other artistic pursuits. Three weeks after I left a Shakespeare festival was held in a small amphitheatre adjacent to the Bowl.

Just before I reached the coast a celebrated London conductor who was a guest at the Bowl had an alarming experience. His first appearance coincided with some club celebration of the Elks or the Lions, or some other joyous fraternity, and many of the younger members assembled in force at the Bowl. Just as — raised his baton, the joyous ones discharged a salvo of rockets and Roman candles, partly in celebration of their gathering together, and partly (less, I fancy) in honour of the English visitor.

The latter was frightened out of his life, promptly withdrew, somewhat and not unjustifiably offended, and declined to proceed with the concert. The combined efforts of the committee, which poured no little general abuse on the exuberant tactics of American youth, subsequently mollified the visitor, and he agreed to return to the rostrum.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE STUDIO

ALL the large studios in California are self-contained. Paramount Famous-Lasky and Metro-Goldwyn, for example, employ from 1,500 to 2,000 persons apiece permanently, and within the limits of their own property carry out all the multifarious functions involved in picture-making. The word studio in America, by the way, implies a collection of buildings devoted to picture-making, and not merely, as in England, the hangar-like edifice (called a "stage" in Hollywood) in which the actual photographing of scenes takes place. Each large studio contains its own workshops, where the various processes are carried on—carpentering, joinery, painting, building, plumbing, plastering, moulding, property-making, scene-designing, and construction; power and light transforming and generation; developing, printing, and projection of films; costuming, clothing, and dressing the artists; repairing the fleet of studio cars required to take players "on location" (*i.e.*, for making films in the open-air away from the studio); and feeding the permanent staff with lunch and evening meal. Included in its employees on the pay-roll when I was in Hollywood, Metro had 5 "production executives," 15 "executives," 55 actors and actresses in the stock company, 35 film-directors, and 80 "writers," a term including scenarists, screenplaywrights, situation-inventors, "gag-merchants," reviewers, adapters, and various people who suggest ideas of all kinds.

You get a good impression of the varied types of people employed, from vice-presidents of the company to typists and negro porters, if you have a look at the "cafeteria" at lunch-time, where you will find them all jumbled together eating their sweet corn or fried chicken.

There are players wearing their yellow make-up and fancy costumes—"stars," "featured players," and "extras"—workmen in their overalls; shirt-sleeved and capped directors, staring anxiously through horn-rimmed pince-nez and wondering whether the "star" will be in a malleable mood after lunch; tinkers, tailors, soldiers, sailors, clerks, mechanics; and "technicians," with expert knowledge of the marvels of new cinematographic processes, sevenfold photography, and so on—hundreds of people all jabbering "movies."

There are eight main studios at Los Angeles (of which Hollywood is really a suburb, lying between the city and the Pacific), corresponding roughly to the distribution companies already referred to:

Paramount Famous-Lasky : 26 acres on Melrose Avenue, Hollywood, with eleven stages, all covered in.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer : 43 acres at Culver City.

First National : 75 acres at Burbank.

United Artists : An expanding studio on Santa Monica Boulevard.

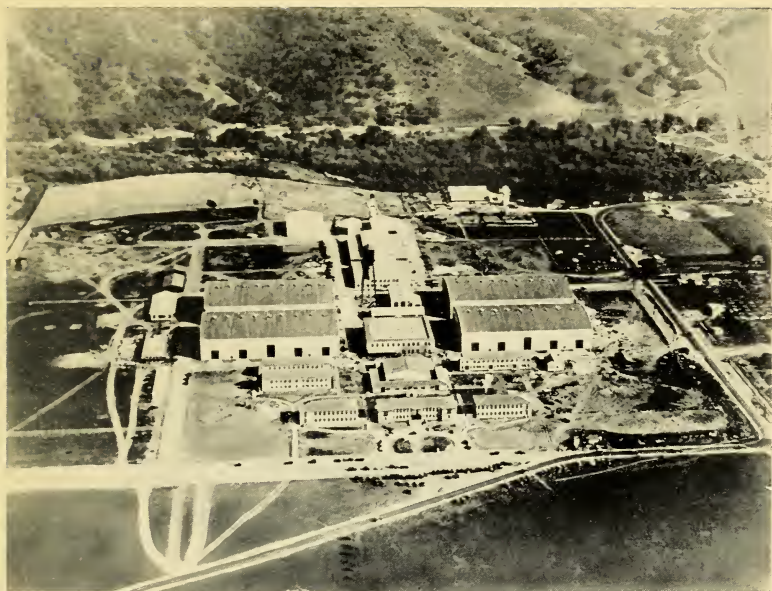
Fox : A studio on Western Avenue, Hollywood, and a 250-acre ranch in Beverley Hills.

Universal : Studio about 600 acres at Universal City, Hollywood.

Warner : Studio on Sunset Boulevard.

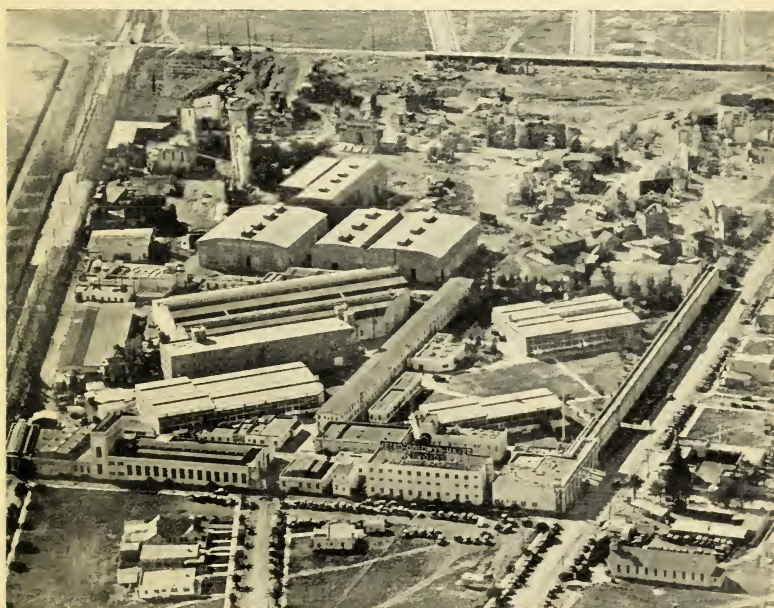
Cecil de Mille : At Culver City (the Thomas Ince studio, which de Mille shares with Samuel Goldwyn).

Film Booking Offices : 14½ acres near Paramount Famous-Players.



First National.

FIRST NATIONAL STUDIO AT BURBANK, LOS ANGELES, BUILT 1926.



Metro-Goldwyn.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER STUDIO AT CULVER CITY, LOS ANGELES.

There are also the Associated Studios, where von Stroheim was producing when I was there; the Metropolitan on Sunset Boulevard, where Harold Lloyd works; the Chaplin lot on La Brea Avenue; Marshall Neilan's; the Christie Brothers' on Sunset Boulevard; the Mack Sennett studio, and several other smaller units.

In these studios are made practically all the 800 full-length (six or more thousand-foot reels) pictures made annually by the Americans. A few pictures are made in and near New York, and a few in Europe—for example, Rex Ingram produces for Metro at Nice. In addition to the full-length pictures, a vast amount of short films are made—topicals, comedies, interest, educational and industrial pictures—varying in length from 1,000 to 2,500 feet apiece. Paramount, for example, produces annually about 120 “shorts.” (It takes, by the way, about twelve minutes to show 1,000 feet of film.)

Production continues all the year round, for California has nine or ten months fine weather in the year. If outside locations are needed, they are available in the essential, dry atmosphere. It is not so much a question of sunshine—that can be duplicated by lamps—as of fine weather, which enables schedules to be worked out a long while ahead and preparations to be made in order to economise in that wholly essential commodity—time. You are practically certain, for example, that May 3 and July 16 will be dry and fine, and you can arrange your production schedule accordingly in the previous March or April.

The Californian studios are not specially interesting architecturally, except Paramount's, which is mostly new, and the fine First National buildings in the mountainous Cahuenga Pass district. In an ideal setting, with Griffith Park in the background, the latter studio

was built (in the record time of seven months) in the picturesque Spanish mission style, and cost $2\frac{1}{2}$ million dollars (£500,000). Artistically, one can make little of the tunnel-like stages (averaging $150 \times 250 \times 35$ feet), but both Paramount and First National devote much attention to beautifying the executive offices and dressing room exteriors. The Burbank dressing-rooms on two floors, with balcony running the full length of the upper floor, are extremely attractive. The grounds are all laid out with flowers and turf, assisted to flourish by much irrigation and spraying.

One or two of the older studios are ramshackle timber affairs, some of the buildings being little better than large-sized army huts, and it is a marvel more of them are not burned down. One small studio was gutted while I was there. It was opposite the Christie lot, and Charles Christie and one or two of his men spent all one Sunday afternoon on the roof of one of their stages extinguishing burning brands hurled across the road by the explosions of celluloid. As it was, they had half a dozen holes to repair. Chaplin's studio also had to deal with a serious outbreak a short while ago.

Most of the stages are constructed on concrete bases with curved roofs like aeroplane hangars, steel frameworks, and tiled walls. They are all built "dark," the walls unwindowed and pierced at intervals only for sliding doors. The sunshine is no longer used on the interior set, lamps having entirely superseded it, and a curious survival of old times is the glass-sided building on the Metro lot. In Germany some of the Ufa stages have glass sides, but the glass is all stained dark blue now.

Every year the cost of running a studio increases. The overheads and cost of equipment are prodigious. The stars and directors are always wanting more

money. At one studio, which I inspected, practically every highly paid individual was receiving more money than that stated in his or her contract. The best stories and the best players go to the companies that pay highest and quickest, and the path of the independent producer is hard. If he discovers a new genius the big companies are after him in a flash, and lure his find away with the prospect of more money. Sooner or later the capable independent himself is sucked into the vortex. He cannot stand the pace set by the big groups.

B. P. Schulberg, the chief executive of Paramount in Hollywood under Jesse L. Lasky, the production chief, was an independent producer, who was forced to give up the struggle. He used to enjoy the day-to-day fight as long as it was endurable, the spending excitement, the camaraderie within the company between director and players, but he simply could not muster the resources to compete with the big organisations. The same story is told of Harry Rapf, now one of Metro's production executives. They would like to be independent, but cannot afford the luxury.

Paramount produces between seventy and eighty full-length films every year, and during the year beginning September, 1927, proposes to spend \$22,000,000 (£4,400,000) on production. It stands to reason that the big company, operating on inner, well-equipped lines, is much better able to undertake the needful mass-production at a cheaper rate than the best independent producer. The big firm is always seeking to rope in the likely independents, and, if they are people with ideas, gives them plenty of money and resources, so that they need not worry about ways and means, as they used to in the old days.

There are in Hollywood, of course, plenty of small studios, dubbed rather disdainfully by their rich rivals

“Poverty Row,” which are able to carry on somehow. There are also optimistic young people who try their luck. But success is hard to attain. One of the best pictures turned out by Poverty Row was “The Salvation Hunters,” a realistic study of three down-and-outs. It made money, and laid the foundation of success for its three principals: George K. Arthur, an Englishman; Miss Georgia Hale, who as a result was chosen by Chaplin as the leading lady for “The Gold Rush”; and Josef von Sternberg, who has gone on directing pictures ever since. Poverty Row can make good once in a while, but it’s an uphill task, and Arthur was reduced to serving in a grocery store in his spare time in order to live while the film was being made. He made £7,000 out of “The Salvation Hunters,” and now has a contract with Metro-Goldwyn which brings him in £150 a week. Speaking generally, however, all the big films come out of the big studios, for it is only they that can afford the enormous expenses involved.

I mentioned in an earlier chapter how ready the companies are to spend money. The average cost of a full-length picture in America is £30,000, which corresponds in England, where the cost of living and production is smaller, to about £17,000. No wonder Hollywood is a magnet drawing people from all over the world. It can afford to pick and choose its servants, when it offers camera-men as much as £150 to £200 a week. “Writers” who reconstruct incidents in a story in order to provide an additional “kick” or laugh are often paid £150 or more a week. An average good story costs £1,000, but popular plays secure fancy prices. I was told that “The Last of Mrs. Cheyney” cost Paramount £17,000, and “Abie’s Irish Rose” £200,000. The star receives from £400 to

£800 a week. Tom Mix gets even more, I believe. The director's remuneration varies from £6,000 to £14,000 a picture; he is not paid by the week. The mechanic and the scene-shifter receive up to £20 a week.

Alfred Reeves, Chaplin's English manager, told me that he was once showing over the studio a humble friend from London, who had come to America to seek fortune. The man probably earned £3 a week in England. A string of cars met his eye inside the studio grounds. "Lumme," he said, "what do you want all those cars for?" "Oh!" said Reeves casually, "most of them belong to the studio staff, mechanics and labourers." At which the scandalised Englishman ejaculated, "Coo, what a nerve!"

I met a young Englishman in Hollywood who had been advised to live in California owing to ill-health brought on by gas-poisoning during the war. He told me a different tale about salaries. "It's all right," he said, "for those inside," and he jerked his thumb Cockney-wise (he came from Walthamstow) at the main gate of one of the large studios. "If you click for a good job, you're on velvet. But I don't believe I am any better off here than in England.

"My job as a chauffeur brings me in a decent lump, but the cost of house and living soon reduces it. We all want to get inside those gates, and, until we do, I find myself wishing I could walk down the Strand and have a bottle of beer in the middle of the day. I believe I'd go back to England, if I hadn't married out here. It all depends here what sort of job you get. So my advice to English folk is, don't come here thinking money grows on trees to be had for the picking. The studio folk are no more generous in the matter of wages than any employer in England, except to those on the inside. For *them* no salary is too high."

CHAPTER XIV

COMMITTEE-MADE PICTURES

THE outsider looking in on Hollywood is free with his criticism of its methods and results. Quite rightly, for only thus can artistic advances be made. Nevertheless, the other side of the picture is worth examining. One gets a little tired of the intense folk who achieve a degree of artistic triumph only through the patronage of generous or foolish wealthy individuals. We could all name stage and screen producers in Berlin, London, and America who have spent enormous sums of money and evolved something that no one but a handful of ecstatic enthusiasts desire to see or hear. Why do so many clever people desire to produce plays and films, both good and bad, which no one wants to see ?

It is good discipline for the artist that he should be compelled to be frugal and considerate. We praise the producer who makes something worth while, but is he justified in spoiling the chances of those who come after him by exhausting the patience and resources of his patron ? Why should a man be so selfish as to satisfy merely his own artistic soul, and omit to please anyone else ? Undisciplined, he almost always becomes introspective. "Drink, dope, degeneration, and despair—you know—art," as Mr. Ronald Jeans says in one of his satires on the "artistic soul."

That was the direction in which the uncontrolled individual led the picture-people. And after a few years they struck and said: "Now we'll try our method."

I don't altogether admire their method—it goes much too far—but I understand it. After a period, during which the individual producers played ducks and drakes with the companies' resources, the committee producing scheme was formulated, and today practically all over the world films are made, not by individuals, but by committees. Is there a single person in England today to whom you would entrust the disposition of the £1,500,000 which each of the big Hollywood concerns spend annually in satisfying the demands of the world's picture-theatres? If such a genius is not to be found, what else can you do but seek the security of the committee system? And the idea has now been adopted not merely in Hollywood, but in Germany, France, and England as well.

The committee's main duties are to avoid waste of time and money, co-ordinate the activities of all departments, and ensure that the films made are saleable. Every individual in the studio is subject to the committee's orders, no matter how celebrated a director or scene-designer or author may be.

There are, of course, still a few men—Chaplin, Fairbanks, Harold Lloyd—who are more or less independent of the large corporations, mainly for one paramount reason—because their pictures make money without the help of a committee. But Chaplin and Lloyd know that they have to please the distributor, because otherwise they cannot reach the exhibitor. Even they cannot produce exactly what they like. They distribute through the big corporations, who become restive if the film does not “roll up a packet.”

Fortunately, both for themselves and their distributors, these independents' main object in life is to please the public, and so great is their reputation that they are able to concentrate all their energies on one picture at a

time. Chaplin and Fairbanks never make more than one picture in a year. Lloyd works a bit faster. As long as they continue as they are at present, everyone will be satisfied. But if they wander from the path of financial safety there are plenty of willing hands to guide them back. It was made pretty clear to Chaplin by his distributors that, whatever he thought, *they* preferred "The Gold Rush" to "A Woman of Paris."

Outside the charmed circle of successful independents almost all the other men have to sell their services and accept the committee's restrictions imposed with the object of making box-office pictures. However unideal the policy may be, it succeeds in evolving new ideas continually, because it attracts all and sundry to try their hand. In Hollywood, you may be razzing garbage-cans one moment and directing pictures at a high salary the next. Show yourself able to turn out a winner, and the job is yours. You don't need a University degree (you discover you have one after you have made a hit) or even influence, though the latter may help.

An English actor without a job borrowed money to pay his fare to Hollywood, and is now earning about £15,000 a year. A girl who was dresser to a bare-back horse-rider in a New York circus is now earning about £3,000 a year as a budding scenarist. But the beginner must be amenable to discipline and ready to take advice. The individual might achieve success now and again, but that is not good enough. The production committee will "help" him to make his financial successes more frequent.

Most studios are run by a "production manager," the chairman of the committee, and two or three "associate producers." These form the nucleus of the executive, which may contain as many as fifteen



Metro-Goldwyn

GRETA GARBO, THE SWEDISH "STAR" IN "THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL."

members, each of whom has a definite department to attend to—lighting, photography, scene-designing, and so on. They are responsible for the preliminary studio work. The detail involved is tremendous, and the committee has to be composed of men with encyclopædic brains in order to carry in their heads the schemes of eight or ten pictures at the same time. It is said that there are only a dozen successful production managers in the world.

On the adequacy of the preparation depends the success of the film. The director (that is, the man who actually “ directs ” the players’ movements on the stage) is enabled thereby to work at twice the speed, for he knows that he will not be delayed at a crucial moment, when his temperamental “ star ” is keyed up. At all costs the failures of other days, due to the system of expecting a single individual to take all the risks of spending £30,000 on a strip of celluloid, must be avoided. Today, nothing is left to chance, an army of experts being at hand to shoulder part of his responsibility.

Hollywood has evolved a complete science of such plans, and the efficiency with which the system is used is perhaps the brightest and most intellectual characteristic of the film-business. It is not too much to say that the prosperity of the business depends upon the efficacy of the preliminary steps. It is fatal to start on a huge production and discover, when all the cast are assembled, that some vital property or scene is not available, and cannot be made available for several weeks.

The amount of preparation involved is astounding. You know how bored we all get with that list of names we see on the screen before the picture itself begins. The art-director, the title-writers, the scenarist, the camera-men. The Barrymore picture, “ The Beloved

Rogue," I observed, even had a "humorous scenes director" specified. None of these officials is superfluous. They must all study the subject and contribute something before it goes into production. Each has a certain amount of time and money for his job. They are organised and organised until they work rigidly to their schedules. Every detail that can possibly be foreseen is considered; all miniature, trick, and fake work is conceived beforehand. The exterior locations are visited and tabulated.

The director is named, the scheme is outlined to him, and his advice is sought as to the "treatment." The "star" and "featured players" members of the stock company are selected and interviewed. The "special types" and "extras" are bespoke for definite dates at the Central Casting Association, an amazing employment agency with 15,000 names on its books and run by the whole film-community. A host of officials are already at work mugging up historical, scientific, and technical research. The studio's own costume department receives its orders, and the wardrobe-mistress's sewing-machines start to sing. The workshops begin turning out the scenery, woodwork, ironwork, and furniture required, and the scene-builders start erecting the "houses" and "rooms" on the stage, and the full-size exterior sets that may be required.

The studio publicity department, meanwhile, has "spilled a bibful." Vague hints have been allowed to slip out that a "big special" is on the way, and the other papers begin running after the "story." A big stunt is engineered to focus the public attention; one of the players discovers that he is descended from the Irish kings, or another is reported engaged or married to an English "milord" or a Russian prince. If

the papers "fall for" the story, it is kept going hard all the time the picture is "in production." The public may be invited to co-operate with the studio staff in choosing the cast, although the committee have already determined it.

Another "peach of an idea" is to choose your subject—say, "Daniel in the Lions' Den"—without announcing it. You then tell the public via the newspapers that the nature of Mr. So-and-so's next subject will be chosen by the community of "film-fans." After a few weeks or months, during which "Daniel" is being got ready and the lions are being trained, the result of the ballot is announced. A majority of votes, strange to say, have been cast for a Biblical subject, preferably one of the Old Testament heroes. The studio's task is now easy. It is stated that no film-company, so far, has tackled Daniel; Daniel, therefore, shall be Mr. So-and-so's next subject. "Bravo! Great Plains and Hot Springs, Arkansas. The first letters opened suggesting respectively the Bible and the Old Testament bore your post-marks."

And one gentle "fan" in Sioux City suggested Daniel—actually. "Bravo! Sioux City; do you know that Milt B. Goshdarnd, who will be 'featured' as Daniel was once a bell-hop in a hotel (not specified) in Sioux City, and arrived in Los Angeles without a cent (riding hobo-fashion on the springs of the California Limited), but with a downright determination to 'break into pictures'? Well, you got to hand it to him now. He's got there, and he is a real credit to Sioux City. The old burg should be proud of her son." And so on.

The ground is now all prepared, and the work of production begins. I will quote one example of the financial value of preliminary preparation. All the

vast crowd scenes for "Ben Hur" were made on one day. On no other day were more than 150 people actually employed in making the picture. Another thing, not always remembered: it is often the treatment of the story that makes for the film's success. After all, there are not many variations of love-story, but you can do wonders with special treatments of quite ordinary plots. It is not often you find a "Beau Geste" type of story, which translates literally into film-form. All that treatment business has to be shaped and reshaped beforehand.

The mere creation of a strip of celluloid is not everything. A good many pictures are entirely remade, and sometimes sequences are ordered to be reconstructed when the "rushes" (short lengths of film) are seen during actual production. Members of the committee and the director spend hours in conference or in the projection-room studying the picture, altering it, sub-titling it, cutting it, shuffling the continuity. The director gives his view and tries to secure concessions. The committee is unmoved, unless the suggestions strengthen the chances of the film gripping the audience; all other ideas, however beautiful, are useful only if you "get a kick from them," or they "fetch a good laugh," or "tear the heart out of you."

The presence of a stock company and the amassed resources of the studio enable endless changes, remakes, and extra expenditure to be undertaken with a minimum of delay. Numerous examples could be quoted. Take "Ben Hur," for example. A company was sent over to Italy to make the film, half a dozen of the leading men in the entertainment business—A. L. Erlanger, the Shuberts, and Marcus Loew among them—being interested financially in it. Months of work costing £400,000 produced a picture, unwieldy

and totally unsuitable, at all events, for American audiences.

The sets at Rome were scrapped, the company was recalled, the Italian players disbanded, and the work began all over again in California. The hippodrome set was built and almost all the picture, including the great chariot-race, was retaken, a dozen or more cameras being used, and huge solid sets, still in existence, were erected in the open air. This represented a further expenditure of £400,000, and placed Fred Niblo, the director, among the foremost of contrivers of spectacle. The point is this. If the additional expenditure had not been sanctioned, the original £400,000 would probably have been lost. Now, even if the sponsors do not make a handsome profit on such a stupendous outlay, at any rate they will not lose their money.

When the picture has been shaped to please the production committee, a "pre-view"* is ordered. A Los Angeles suburban cinema is chosen, and, without previous warning, the new picture is slid into the programme, while members of the committee sit among the audience, listen to the comments, and judge how the public like it. Little as they may know it, the public may be assisting at the death of a picture. It may be shelved as a failure, or its director may be reported to headquarters as a most promising newcomer. Whatever individuals in the studio think goes for nothing. But if the hard-boiled audiences on Pico Street or "down town" "walk out on the show," they are signing someone's death-warrant. Los Angeles audiences, being used to the film-folk and

* There has been some agitation recently on the part of American exhibitors against the pre-views, on the ground that they disturb the pictures' regular runs. The process may be modified or altered, but it is difficult to see how it can be dispensed with entirely.

their ways, are always more hard to please than, say, the inhabitants of Galveston or Dodge City. A good margin of approval is, therefore, left for emergencies. Nor is one "pre-view" enough. It may be repeated after every new idea, series of gags, or set of situations has been incorporated. The film may even be put aside altogether, shelved for a period, until someone gets a new "slant" on the subject. I will illustrate this from the career of Irving Thalberg.

Thalberg, one of Metro's executives, is a remarkable young man. Starting life as a Brooklyn law-student, he lost his health and went to California in search of sunshine. Gaining a position in a business-house, he discovered the value of Spanish, and set himself to it so energetically that in four months he had become an expert stenographer in that language. Then the pictures called him, and he joined Carl Laemmle's staff at Universal City in a small capacity.

Promotion came quickly, and finally a transfer to Metro, where I found him the most sought after man on the lot and working thirteen or fourteen hours a day interviewing the directors and heads of departments. "We all take our troubles to him," said an Englishman fifteen years or more his senior. With Louis B. Mayer and Harry Rapf, Thalberg forms the inner production executive. Mayer was the man who pulled the Goldwyn Company out of the fire for Marcus Loew, and Rapf, as I have already explained, was an independent producer, who found the competition too keen outside the big groups, and has since discovered his niche inside one of them.

One example will illustrate better than a hundred arguments what "committee-made pictures" mean. "The Big Parade" will, perhaps, make more money before its career finishes than any film ever produced.

In England it was unfairly criticised in some papers, but even they have since admitted that it was a remarkable picture. Its history briefly was this. It was written as a screen-story by Laurence Stallings (who had made a big reputation with his play of the war, "What Price Glory," written in collaboration with Maxwell Anderson), and allotted for picture production by Metro to King Vidor. This capable director was not greatly impressed by it; it seemed just another war incident, and few of those concerned in making it had tasted war at first hand (hence the mistakes made in the military detail, which were justifiably criticised in England).

Then one evening, after the pre-view, when the picture seemed doomed to become little more than a programme feature, Thalberg had a brain-wave. He would turn "The Big Parade" into a great national epic—young America's part in the war—a patriotic gesture, in fact. The effect of this decision was astonishing. The whole picture was remade, new money was spent, new scenes written, Vidor was seized with enthusiasm, and turned out the best picture he had ever directed.

Moreover, it was more than a great money-maker; it was one of the finest examples of screen-craft, despite the mistakes in it. A clergyman of my acquaintance went to see it at the Tivoli, and, though he hardly ever goes to the movies, was greatly impressed. He wanted me to sit down at once and write an article in praise of America for sending us such a fine moral lesson!

The principle of committee-made pictures causes many people to tear their hair with rage. To them it is a contradiction in terms that a work of art should be the work of a dozen individuals. And yet is it

such a fearful crime? The opera is the product of several minds—composer, librettist, scene-designer, singers, conductor, orchestra—and how they confound each other sometimes! It is the same thing with the play. I do not see why the committee-made picture must be an artistic failure. Certainly, queer results are achieved sometimes, and the committee, in the interests of shareholders, perform surgical operations on novels and plays, which cause acute pain to the authors. But I suppose mistakes are inevitable in the panic-stricken atmosphere of Hollywood, where everyone is terrified lest the public shall “pass up” one of his films. The film is still in swaddling-clothes, and I have an idea that the production committee stage will pass, as the individual gains more confidence. But in America, at any rate, the contention will persist to the end of time that it is absurd, even wrong, to make non-commercial films. That belief forms part of the American ego.

The type of films produced is criticised by many within the studio, but I found that directors of ability with a keen desire to improve the quality of films were less inclined to blame the production committees than the public. Thus Monta Bell, who was Chaplin’s assistant in “A Woman of Paris,” and has since built up a reputation for quick and economical directing: “We are (he told me) being held back continually by the attitude of the public to films. We can’t make the pictures we want to because the public is slow to adopt new ideas and we always have to play for safety.

“We know that most of the good films have been made by men not afraid to experiment, and that so far we have scarcely started to explore the motion-picture’s potentialities. Yet we have to stick to outworn conventions, because the public continues to prefer a mere show. The trouble with America is that the



Metro-Goldwyn.

THE CHARIOT RACE IN "BEN HUR."



Metro-Goldwyn.

THE CHARIOT SMASH IN "BEN HUR."

picture-theatres are filled with people who have more money than discrimination."

Eric von Stroheim, whose work bears a distinctive mark, even though its sordid strain offends some people, holds the view that all the best films are over the heads of the film-going public. "The average audience (he says) is not prepared to exert itself, and remains stubbornly conservative until jerked out of its groove by some startling picture. We are wasting our time if we attempt a call upon the imagination. We have adopted, therefore, this course if we want to stress some subtle meaning. We play the scene in such a way that it shall not offend the mass of the public.

"But for the benefit of those who bother to use their brains we provide one or two pointers which suggest an additional, more subtle aspect. For people who want to read more into a scene than meets the eye of the mass we indicate that the additional attraction is there.

"The idea involves," he added, "much careful planning, but it is worth trying. If only the public would make an effort and ask for something more intelligent, we should have a chance of advancing. As it is, expenses are very high, and we can't afford to make pictures that do not show a profit.

"I am hopelessly Americanised now, and I have produced so many scenes reflecting on pre-war life in Vienna, and suggesting its luxury, that I can't even go there to visit my mother. I am not able to visit my native country; I am not welcome; and my mother has to come here to see me."

The worship of the box-office is not an ideal cult, and has been responsible for some of Hollywood's worst crimes. There are still many people making pictures which they know to be bad, under the mis-

taken impression that the public wants bad pictures. In my view, these undesirable folk are being steadily eliminated, simply because sincerity is absolutely essential. The executives know this quite well, and are aware that the public, as it becomes wiser and more experienced in film-lore, will call the bluff and won't tolerate having their leg pulled.

During the last year all the best films have been free from false ideas. It is the best sign yet observed during the film's evolution. All the big companies have observers in Europe studying the film-situation, and they report a distinct revolt against the false sentiment and insincere handling which a few years ago was the distinguishing mark of an American picture.

CHAPTER XV

“CAMERA !”

I SUPPOSE it must be the chance of earning high salaries that induces men and women to go in for film-acting. With conditions of production as they are at present, I can think of no other reason why anyone should leave a good job or even a bad one for it. Yet people do in ever-increasing numbers. Catchpenny film-schools exist in every country, beguiling hard-earned money out of pockets that can ill-afford it, and promising what they can never fulfil. People write to me and ask how they can get on the film—they have the right features and temperament, and so on, and have acted Joanna Trout in “Dear Brutus” for the Tooting Amateur Acting Society.

I was told in Los Angeles that there are always 20,000 men and women more than are actually needed, looking for jobs in the studios. A regular floating population. They float into the lobbies of the casting offices and ask for jobs, and wait in vain for them. They doll themselves up in the most astonishing style, hoping to make an impression.

I was calling one day on Lupino Lane in the studio where he was working in Hollywood, when I noticed an extraordinary looking young person sitting in the hall of the offices. She was about five feet tall and dressed all in black. Her short, net-like skirt did not disguise the fact that her black silk stockings failed to effect contact with whatever she wore beneath it, and

her smooth silken bodice indicated clearly that she was constructed on the regulation, sharply defined model. She was heavily made up, blacked eyelashes and enamelled lips and cheeks, and her head was tightly imprisoned in a saucepan-like hard hat. Brought forward on her cheeks were two long, sharp shark's teeth of lemon-coloured hair, and she rested her gloved hands at the ends of dimpled arms bare to the shoulder on a longish-handled parasol. She stared straight ahead, paying attention to no one, and without moving so much as a muscle which might disturb her make-up or symmetrical pose. I thought that she was about twenty-two and was after a job. I expected every moment that someone would come in and wind her up with a key or put her in a shop-window and redress her. I looked round for a camera, half expecting that she was already acting in a film.

There must be hundreds of such hard-pretty girls that the film draws to Hollywood. They may get a few jobs, but the pay is poor because it is not regular, not much more regular than it is in England. I believe £50 is considered quite a reasonable amount for an extra to earn in a year here—say, £100 in Los Angeles. With the best will in the world I cannot recommend anyone without good qualifications to go in for a screen career; there are too many on the job already, and the life is under no circumstances an easy-going, pleasant occupation.

Frankly I do not know how the players, especially the women, stand the strain. In the summer the studios become unbearably hot when the lights are on full, and exterior work in the sun, except for the hardest, is no light task. In the winter, "going on location"—that is, going away from the studio and working in the open air—may be extremely unpleasant. In the moun-

tains there are snow, avalanches, and “ wash-outs ” which delay train and car, and the need to find solitude for a scene necessitates long journeys into almost inaccessible regions.

Add to this, that members of a stock company—all large studios have their own stock companies—more often than not are playing rôles which they do not enjoy. Except in the case of the leading stars, there is little chance of a stock-player being consulted as to his part. It is “ assigned ” to him, and he or she “ gets on ” with it. All studio staffs work extremely hard, and the film directors and players have to maintain the pace.

Beatrice Lillie told me that coming to the pictures from the stage was a great shock to her time-schedules. She had to be on the set regularly by nine in the morning, and went to bed, in view of this ordeal, almost before dark. No parties for her ! Douglas Furber, who was working as a “ gag-merchant ” and “ writer,” generally doctoring and enlivening scenarios, told the same story. You can hardly prevail on the production executives to leave the studio at all. They may be there from nine in the morning till ten at night.

Moreover, film-folk are in the limelight, and the slightest unpleasantness or scandal is magnified by the newspapers into a gigantic incident, alleged to be representative of the whole business. I do not suppose that the rate of divorce is any higher in Los Angeles than in New York—the film-folk do not marry and are not given in marriage any more frequently than American “ high society.” But wheresoever the actors and actresses are, there will the scandal-mongers be gathered together, to nudge and twitter and exaggerate and insinuate.

Actually, the film-folk are too keen on making money, as are all Americans, to let domestic troubles disturb

them, and only the newspaper, with its unbridled licence, flogs the dirty-linen water into a froth. The unwanted impressions of married life with Charlie Chaplin, which appeared recently under the name of his former wife, Mildred Harris, proved pathetic rather than lurid.

No, the camera is too hard a task-master to permit its servants unlimited self-indulgence. Signs of dissipation may be hidden under grease-paint by the stage-actor, but the relentless camera searches out the very reins and heart of any who do not reserve all their powers for their work. Even in New York, screen-players who were guests at a house where I was staying withdrew at ten o'clock because they had to be "on the set" at eight the next morning. A few impressions of well-known actors and actresses at work will illustrate my meaning and show that "going on the films" is no holiday.

One hot afternoon I drove out with a few friends from Metro up the Cahuenga Pass north of Hollywood to a location supposed to represent the Highlands of Scotland, where Miss Lillian Gish was making a scene for a film to be called "Annie Laurie." We were in a small valley, and to me, at any rate, the heat was unbearable. So was the dust, which numerous feet and wheels had churned up on the surface. There must have been two hundred persons there, including Miss Gish, the star; Norman Kerry and Creighton Hale, who were the featured players; John S. Robertson, the director; and all the technicians, camera-men, continuity clerks, and hordes of extras in Scottish dress.

Miss Gish herself wore a heavy tartan dress with a voluminous plaid. On the dusty grass she and Mr. Hale and several extras were dancing a reel, the "music" being supplied by a girl, who simply sang, "One, two,

three, four—one, two, three, four.” They went on with this for about half an hour, some of the scene being shot now and again. Surrounding the little group were a ring of studio arc lamps, blazing full, the “ juice ” being supplied by a dynamo mounted on a motor-lorry roaring in the background. With a slightly larger radius was a half-circle of huge burnished metal and glass reflectors arranged to cast the reflection of the sun on the scene.

This was the atmosphere in which the players had to act. I don’t know how they could get any dramatic expression into it. Everything that could be contrived to distract the players’ attention was present. What to me would have been the final blow was when someone asked Miss Gish to pose for a still photograph with us. She graciously did so, but I felt it was really asking too much of anyone to smile and look pleasant during an interruption which merely involved extra time being spent in that weary spot.

Another day I watched Pola Negri making the film entitled “ Hotel Imperial ” in the new Paramount Famous-Lasky studio. She was appearing in the scene where, as the Austrian chambermaid, she is resenting the advances of the Russian commander (George Siegman). Mauritz Stiller, the Swede, is directing under the supervision of Erich Pommer, the former production chief of Ufa.

A small space about ten feet square represents a room in the hotel where the two characters were quarrelling. All the rest of the studio stage is cluttered up with scenery belonging to other sets. Scores of extra men in Russian uniforms are lounging about on property chairs. The painted walls, built up only so far as necessary, seem tawdry in the mixed light caused by numerous beams emanating from a dozen lamps on

the ground or slung up in the roof and on the sides of the stage.

The heat from the arcs and the vapour from the mercury lamps are oppressive. The inextricable confusion of wheeled lamp-stands ("dollies"), electric cables, properties, and human beings seem to swallow up every particle of breathable air. A score of workmen, carpenters and mechanics, are at hand, some sawing and hammering, others awaiting instructions, none knowing anything of the scene apart from his own function, all dependent on the director, who alone of the whole crowd on the set knows what it all means. In these surroundings the players must "emote" all they know.

A particularly vigorous thrust by Siegman, and Miss Negri goes spinning across the floor and crashes on a small stove, with resultant scratches and bruises. First aid required, and she sits on a Russian chair while the studio nurse bathes her arm and shin. It's all in the day's work. The workmen go on hammering, the electricians adjust their carbons. The cameraman measures distances with a tape-measure, judges angles, and records with a couple of turns of his crank-handle the number of the shot chalked on a board held up by his assistant. Despite, or perhaps as a result of, the accident, the shot was a good one.

All the while the studio orchestra, comprising a piano, a couple of fiddles, and a 'cello, drone suitable music, calculated to bring a laugh or a tear from the heroine as required. Personally I doubt if music helps anyone much to "emote." But I think it helps the players to get their minds off their dismal surroundings.

I remember watching Carlyle Blackwell playing in a scene at the Islington studios in London for the film

entitled “ The Rolling Road.” He was supposed to be washed overboard from a schooner and then hurled back by a great wave. Large tanks were erected near the roof of the studio at the side of the property ship, and at a given signal from Graham Cutts, the director, the “ ship ” was rocked and water was released down a chute, the bottom of which was curved upwards like a J. Helped by the rush of water, Mr. Blackwell clambered over the side of the ship and ran to the heroine’s help.

At the time, I believe, he was suffering from a slight attack of pleurisy, and he had to go through the water floods a dozen or more times before the scene was finally completed. In addition, icy water poured down from the sprays in the roof, and was hurled in all directions by aeroplane propellers turned by dynamos at the side of the set.

Well, that sort of thing goes on every day in the studio, and you can’t allow little things like pneumonia to hold up the entire action of an expensive cast and studio staff. It is not even as if one had the maximum of comfort in dressing-rooms where one could withdraw. It is a rough-and-tumble business, which necessitates your traversing corridors and draughty passages, and as soon as you are off, you start to get wet again. There’s no rest—no sympathetic atmosphere. The artists are on edge, and the “ floor ” is generally in chaos.

Confusion has reigned supreme on almost every occasion when I have visited a studio, be it in Los Angeles, London, or Berlin. It seems inevitable, and is said not seriously to injure results. To a layman this seems incredible, and you ask: “ Why not have a system ? ” The answer is that it has been tried and has failed. Several companies in Los Angeles tried to evolve studio discipline. Every scene was to be

shot by numbers, and properties, extras, and scenery were to be moved and halted with military precision. Elaborate schemes were worked out, but broke down in practice. Directors complained that their own ideas were being restricted. Players thought they had to undergo enough discipline already from the director and production chiefs without any new additions. The drilling of the workmen proved an almost impossible task, as so many unforeseen circumstances cropped up, causing them, as it were, to break rank or step. Moreover, American workmen and mechanics are none too fond of being disciplined.

And the waiting! Despite endless, careful preparation, no director can work to within minutes or even hours. Players are ordered for a certain time, but other considerations supervene and they have to stand by for half a day. In the less highly organised English studios I have been told that extras have stood by all day doing nothing, and have been then dismissed until the next day. I do not know if there is any worse agony than that, especially when you may be called upon for some display of emotion. One gets used to it in time, as on the stage, but it seems worse in the studio. The atmosphere is certainly less intimate, the building is gigantic, dust and dirt are spread everywhere, and there is no privacy. Being a studio extra is plain hell.

Besides, there's no applause for extra or star, when both have acted perfectly. Nazimova said she went back to the stage because she missed the applause. Numerous film-stars spend periods on the New York stage, I believe, solely for that reason. They could not stand the strain of pictures without some sort of relief. One film-actor said to me: "It's the dullness of film-acting that gets on your nerves. Always

doing the same thing. Much more variety on the stage.”

Just by way of contrast, and because filming is such a complex business, let us take one cursory glance at Harold Lloyd at work one sunny morning. There are moments of excitement and tension in the Lloyd studio, when it seems impossible that any reasonable film can be made of the strips of celluloid which have recorded vaguely a series of confused impressions. This morning, however, it is quiet on the Metropolitan “ lot.” Out of the brilliant light you step suddenly through a sliding door on to a dark stage. Thin streams of light come in through other doors, and as you get accustomed to the darkness you see half a dozen players sitting round a camera chatting quietly.

You join them for a moment and sit down while your guide goes off to seek Mr. Lloyd. The enormous barn-like stage seems strangely empty. There are no arcs or mercury lamps. It is as still as a cathedral at midnight. Gradually you discover that there are pieces of scenery near you, a room in a country farmhouse or something. “ One moment,” you are told, “ then Mr. Lloyd will be here. He is talking to one of his gag-men ; an intricate bit of business.” Knowing your Harold Lloyd comedies, you appreciate what this means, for Lloyd works with a whole platoon of gag-men, whose sole job is to think out new, funny ideas and evolve treatment for them. Lloyd himself is the arbiter of their value.

In a minute or two you go round the edge of the scenery, and in a dark corner, sitting on the kitchen dresser, is the object of your search. Clad in a white shirt, grey flannel bags, and soft shoes is a tall, spare man, who speaks in gentle, deprecating, almost diffident tones. If you did not know him for a most capable,

ingenious director and comedian, who has made five continents rock with laughter, you would say he was too gentle—shall I say too sensitive?—to be a film-producer. You might take him for a young university professor.

Except when he is actually filming he is glad to get rid of his glass-less, horn-rimmed spectacles, in which he always appears, and his wife and little girl don't know him as the public see him. His film-company, one of the richest in Hollywood, is almost a family affair; his father is the treasurer, his brother is his assistant director. The family, incidentally, is proud of its mixed English, Scotch, and Welsh descent. Lloyd has none of that aggressiveness you meet with on many studio stages. You might wonder how he ever could become the wealthiest young man in the business. It is an astonishing rise, for I suppose half a dozen years ago nobody had ever heard of Harold Lloyd. All his finance is his own.

His success is almost entirely due to his habit of catering wholly for children. He is content to let the grown-ups find entertainment in his films, if they want to. Hence you never see a risky sequence in a Lloyd film; it is always a mixture of adventure and farce, and there is no stinting. You get your money's worth. I suppose the names of Chaplin and Lloyd are better known than any in the entertainment world.

Lloyd has one hobby—dogs; he has eighteen of them—all sizes and shapes.

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPLIN IN HIS STUDIO

THE Chaplin studio on La Brea Avenue occupies a fine position, and can be extended at any time up to the corner of Sunset Boulevard. Compared, however, with the producing centres of the great companies it is small, compact, and unassuming. The first time I called there it seemed to be a haven of peace and quietness. Alfred Reeves, Chaplin's general manager, showed me round. These two have worked together since the Fred Karno days.

We walked across the "lot" towards the far corner and passed through a huge circular marquee. "This has been up for nine months," said my guide, "so you see we don't hurry. It doesn't matter really, for the older it is the better; it is being used for 'The Circus,' the picture Charlie is still making." Inside the tent, round the tan floor, were tiers of seats which had been used for the audience, when Chaplin walked the tight-rope and ran at full speed on the revolving drum.

By now we had reached the far edge of the "lot," where we found a group of a dozen studio-folk, some of them standing on a little platform round a couple of cameras with a sloping awning to keep off the sun, and others dotted about, dawdling or performing small jobs. Large white linen reflectors were reflecting the light into the corners of a long circus cage on wheels, in which a fat lion reclined in sulky laziness. One or two members of the company sat under the

lemon-trees, a clerk or two were making notes, the camera-men, one of whom comes from Hartlepool, were calculating distances between camera and cage.

Captain Gay, the lions' trainer, was in the cage; Henry East and his famous little cross-bred bulldog actor, Buddy, were looking on; Merna Kennedy, Chaplin's leading lady, a slip of a bronze-red-haired, girl with eyelids made up green, was sucking a lemon meditatively; Harry Crocker, Chaplin's assistant, and Henry Bergman, the stout comedy actor, who has been in Chaplin's pictures for eleven years—he played six rôles in "The Kid"—occupied other seats. It was not until I had settled down in a chair that I suddenly became aware of a diminutive figure hunched on the corner of the camera platform, curly greying-black hair, a dirty buff striped waistcoat, wide Gladstone collar yellow with grease-paint, heavy and ancient grey trousers, well down over the heels of disreputable, patched, many-sizes-too-large boots.

It was Charles Spencer Chaplin, and here he was going to produce a scene before my very eyes. A stroke of luck—for I might equally well have arrived on a day when he was down at Catalina Island fishing, or not feeling in the mind for working. Instead, I saw him engaged on a characteristic sequence, which, provided he does not include it in the 193,000 feet of celluloid he will scrap out of the 200,000 he has shot, ought to be one of the funniest ever conceived.

The scene is a circus, and Chaplin is playing the part of Charlie, a down-at-heel tramp, who, while wandering about behind the tent (you see it in the background), contrives to get himself locked up in the cage. The lion is asleep in one corner, and Charlie is looking round to see how he can get out, when a dog comes up to the cage and begins barking. "Sh-sh," says Charlie,

pointing to the lion, "you'll wake him up." But the dog barks more than ever, and gradually the lion begins to stir. Charlie tries to kick the dog away through the bars, whereupon it seizes his trousers and pins him fast.

Then a circus-girl, for whom Charlie has conceived a hopeless passion, comes running up and drives the dog away. "Open the door," he groans; "look, the lion's getting up." The girl goes to the door to unbolt it, and suddenly faints, appalled at Charlie's predicament. Charlie seizes the lion's drinking-pan and tries to revive the girl by splashing water through the bars over her, all the time casting anxious glances over his shoulder. The lion is gradually getting nearer, and suddenly makes a vicious snap at Charlie, who drops the pan with a crash and leaps to the other end of the cage.

The lion, however, only sniffs the air and settles down in the corner. Charlie wants to impress the revived girl, who has now opened the door, and refuses to come out. "There's no danger," he boasts; "look!" and he goes over to the lion a little gingerly. "Come here, old boy," he says. "You see" (to the girl), "there's no danger. He's quite friendly." He goes a little nearer, and the lion gives another snarl and snaps at him again. He dashes off for the door, and so on.

The Chaplin method does not call for hurry, and so there was time for all kinds of jokes. I wished I could have made a short film of Chaplin playing about in the cage and chatting amiably to the lion, trying to make it sniff and twitch its nostrils, when it was supposed to suspect the proximity of human flesh. Actually, the actor-lion knows the human smell so intimately, that he is thoroughly blasé, and all manner of odours—garlic, onions, meat, and eau-de-cologne—had to be tried before the correct effect was secured.

Then the lion was removed and Chaplin went into the cage to practise his business. Every movement has to be worked out in angles and inches. The lion's jump and Chaplin's jump must be calculated exactly, for we cannot afford to lose the world's greatest comedian. There is a moment's respite, while calculations are made. Suddenly a shout from the cage, "Look, I'll show you what we want," and Chaplin is lying on the floor of the cage imitating the lion. He hunches his back, grunts, roars, moves restlessly round on all fours, rolls over in the dust, and rubs his body artfully against the bars, growling and baring his teeth. Crocker "plays" him with a boathook and a whip, but the "lion" is in no mood for being prodded, and lashes out at the "trainer," putting him to flight through the door.

Over the bold legend across the bottom of the cage—"KEEP AWAY, DANGEROUS"—Chaplin stands in characteristic pose, arms through the bars and folded, weight on one foot, the other leg crossed over and resting on the point of a disreputable boot, his compelling smile spread over his face. "Come on," says the lion; "I've got a new idea. Couldn't we——"

The next pause found Chaplin reciting "To be or not to be, that is the question," in devilish mockery of John Barrymore, and then burlesquing himself in his own part in "The Circus." He knows a good deal more Shakespeare than he is given credit for. Now he has some comic bit to do himself. He shakes himself, takes a turn up and down the cage, and says to the camera-man, "Wait a moment till I get funny." Then he returns glowing with smiles. "Now let's really mean it this time—steady; camera," and the handle turns. The scene is shot. "That's going to be good," says the protagonist.



CHARLIE CHAPLIN "MAKES UP" IN THE LION'S CAGE ("THE CIRCUS").

The camera is on platform behind canvas reflector.



CHAPLIN AT HIS STUDIO SWIMMING POOL.

Next it has to be all repeated with the lion in the cage, and though it was a trained lion, we sigh with relief when he is safely out of the cage. After all, you do not let a lion breathe on you for fun, and Chaplin declared the lion's breath was hot ! It reminded him of another sequence in the film when he had to blow an imaginary horse-pill into an aged hack's mouth, and he told a story of an old ostler, who always refused to administer a pill that way ? " Why not," said someone. " Well," replied the old fellow, " one day I held the pill just in my teeth and took a deep breath to blow it to the back of the old mare's throat, when she blew first. Danged if I can't still taste it."

Chaplin's quarters at the La Brea Avenue studios consist of his room next the main office and the bungalow. The former is a long apartment furnished like a club lounge—a large table in the middle, and comfortable chairs and couches arranged at various angles. In one far corner is a writing-table, in the other a door leading into a little dressing-room. The writing-table is interesting to an Englishman, because on it stands framed one of Chaplin's most treasured possessions, a full-length cartoon in *Punch*. Dated September, 1925, it shows M. Caillaux, on behalf of France, whispering in Chaplin's ear and asking him what is the recipe for extracting favourable terms from America. It is a good cartoon with plenty of spirit and life in it, though Mr. Reeves says it makes Charlie too fat.

* Cartoons from two other English papers and sundry American journals and several caricatures are also ranged on the table, and more on the walls, but apart from these knick-knacks there is little to suggest the film-star.

The dressing-room looks exactly like any other

dressing-room—sticks of grease-paint, pots of vaseline, mirrors, and electric lights—but one thing immediately catches the eye. It is one of the famous black toothbrush moustaches mounted on a white comb, and ready to be attached to the upper lip complete in a second. The material resembles fine wool, but I believe it is actually hair of a woolly variety. The only other make-up is grease-paint for the face, and black to emphasise the eyebrows. As a matter of fact, Chaplin does not use these rooms much. They are too near the front entrance, and he is frightened of importunate callers. When he has to engage someone for his cast he makes Mr. Reeves walk up and down with the player on the grass outside, and estimates his value by inspecting him through a curtained window.

The bungalow is at the far side of the lot. It contains a dressing-room, a dining-room, a bath-room, and a kitchen. The last time I was in the dressing-room the famous black bowler hat and yellow cane were lying on the table. On a smaller table was another white comb complete with another black moustache. In the opposite corner stood a large cabinet gramophone.

The dining-room is the most interesting apartment on the Chaplin lot, for it is there that all the stories and gags are worked out. In the middle is a small table, and three or four office arm-chairs are usually drawn up round it. One is set apart for Chaplin's special use, and the others contain variously his assistant and a secretary, and anyone else needed for a discussion. More often than not, however, Chaplin paces the carpet backward and forward thinking hard, and occasionally ordering something to be set on paper. All his recent pictures have been evolved over that table. Copious notes are taken, but it often happens that they

are never used. There is no set script for use, as in most studios.

In one corner of the room is Clare Sheridan's bust of Chaplin. "That's the thing we all love," said someone jocularly. "When we disagree with Chaplin, we come and snap our fingers under the bust's nose and then feel better."

On the opposite side of the room is a harmonium, a small wind-organ on which Chaplin plays at times, and suggests an accompaniment to fit in with a scene. He is most punctilious about the musical score, and bemoans the fact that in so many theatres the music is unsuitable for his films and rendered inefficiently. "Music is extremely important," he said; "that is why I welcome the efforts being made to provide music by mechanical systems, such as the De Forest and the vitaphone. Mechanical music which has the quality of a symphony orchestra is much better as an accompaniment than feeble vamping on a piano or the excruciating efforts of an incompetent and ill-led orchestra."

One day, as the properties were being cleared away, Chaplin sank into a canvas chair. "Worst of filming," he said, "is it makes you lazy." Yet he was wringing wet with the heat, and we urged him to go in and change. He pulled up his trouser-leg, and his valet removed the leather legging he wore beneath to prevent Buddy's teeth sinking into the flesh. At last, with black eye-brow make-up smeared across his face, he rose wearily and went into the bungalow.

A moment later he reappeared, full of beans and smiles, clad only in his trousers, socks, and boots. "No ladies being about," he said; "I think a sun-bath would do one good." Down he sat on the step. He talked of England and the theatre, and the days when he appeared in melodrama, and gave us a comical

burlesque of the part he used to play on tour in England in "The Merry Major."

"Your bungalow," I said, "looks like a cottage in England—Kent, Sevenoaks, or somewhere. "Sevenoaks," he echoed. "That reminds me of a day when I went out on a motor-cycle. It belonged to my brother Sydney and me, a joint-stock affair. We took it out and rode it round the streets. I got on, and as I turned the corner at the end of our road I suddenly thought I'd go to Folkestone. I rode on and on, leaving my brother waiting in the street. I knew nothing about the machine, and it went on until it stopped—suddenly. I reached home, pushing it, at four in the morning."

As we talked, a venerable, fat, and lethargic dog waddled rheumatically forward and did the honours to the visitor by allowing me to stroke him. "The dog of 'A Dog's Day,'" said Chaplin. "It was the only picture he appeared in; then we pensioned him off. He's old and disobedient now, and never comes when you call him. Hey! here, boy." Everyone joined in the chorus, but the veteran merely wagged one ear and tottered off on his own, serene in the knowledge that he was on the pay-roll of the Chaplin Film Corporation. "He only looked in to see if there was any food about; sugar and sweets have been his undoing," said his owner. "He must be fourteen now, and his discipline is hopeless."

Chaplin always has afternoon tea in the bungalow when he is working. All who work with him have caught this English disease, even D'Abbadie d'Arrast, the French director, who helped in the making of "The Gold Rush." He often drops in for a cup of tea, and a subsequent swim in the studio bathing-pool.

“Tea?” said someone. “Tea!” shouted Chaplin to the Japanese servants, and a welcome clatter of cups replied. Chaplin put on a clean shirt and an ancient grey tweed jacket, and we went inside. On the work-table was spread a typical English tea. We drew up Chaplin, Bergman, Crocker, and myself—and in came the teapot. Everyone partook of it and ate sandwiches and cake, but only the two Londoners took milk in their tea.

The talk reverted to the stage. “It’s all to pieces now,” said Chaplin. “In the wrong hands. Isn’t it preposterous that some of the people who run the New York stage today should be able to dictate to authors of repute what they shall write? They say: ‘Boy, you must change that. WE know what the public wants. You must put a kick into that scene, or it’ll flop. Don’t you worry; you may have spent two years writing the durned play, but WE will put you wise.’ As far as I can see, the London stage is not much better off. Now, I used to admire Tree, whatever they said against him. I always got something out of his acting. Twenty years ago there were giants in the theatre. Now it’s all gone to the dogs.

“To some extent it’s the same in the film business.” “But they don’t control *you*,” said Crocker. “No, thank Heaven,” Chaplin went on, “they don’t. Fortunately I’m independent. No one says us ‘yea’ or ‘nay.’ The other folk may be quite right. They know the business-end all right, but I couldn’t make films if someone else was telling me what to do.

“The present position exactly suits me. I could never go back to the stage to act, because I could never face the audience again; always was nervous. For me the ideal state is to be segregated away from the public. Hence, I suppose, I went into films. But I think I

might possibly produce a play one day. I should rather like to do that."

"Are you ever going to make another film like 'A Woman of Paris'?" I asked. "Possibly," he said; "one never knows. When I'm in the mood, I will." He added that he may make his next film, "The Suicide Club," based on an original story (not R. L. Stevenson) in London. He is coming over here for the first showing of "The Circus," and may remain for a time, if studio facilities are available.

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPLIN THE MAN

You would do well to distrust most of the reports you have heard of Charlie Chaplin. You are told he is an unpractical dreamer, stumbling into success after landing in Hollywood without a penny, never condescending to earthly things, walking about forgetting his appointments and offending his friends, with a volume of turgid verse in his hand and an expression of pain on his face. Almost all this is imaginary. He was a well-established low comedian, earning £20 a week in 1911, touring in America, when he reached Los Angeles with a considerable film-contract in his pocket. As to his disposition, he is a man of strong personality who is somewhat easily depressed when his work worries him (who is there that is not ?), and his moods change suddenly.

But no one who has met him can fail to be struck by his generous smile and his dynamic energy, two characteristics that must inevitably create an unescapable influence. His devotion to his work is infectious. He must always be doing something. At times the magnitude of his task seems to overcome him, mainly because he never gives his mind a moment's rest from consideration of some aspect of the story he is handling at the moment. Day and night his brain goes on revolving fresh ideas and treatments.

The artist in him rebels when his methods of self-expression are checked, and when incidents occur

upsetting the smooth course of a scene he is impatient until regularity is restored. He cannot help being something of the autocrat, simply because he is everything in the picture—author, director, principal actor, and producer. Every phase of the picture, including (during the past couple of years) the financing, has to be supervised by him. But any vigour he may display in setting circumstances aright is mollified by his humanity. Unlike many successful directors, Chaplin does not consider himself divinely inspired. He is content to hold the mirror up to the humdrum side of life, and depend on everyday occurrences that happen in every family and at any moment of the day to supply the material on which to work.

His humanness is his most distinctive characteristic. His early years of poverty and insignificance help him to a wholesome contempt for cant and hypocrisy. A favourite expression of his is that too many people in his business "kid themselves that they are artists." He spoke in confidence of a few well-known figures, who with the money-urge in their hearts deny it with their lips, and pretend that they are anything except mere showmen and entertainers. Chaplin, despite all the high-falutin' descriptions of him, never claims anything for his films except that they may amuse a large number of people. If they fail, or if they are spoiled by bad exploitation or bad musical accompaniment, if their original purpose—entertainment—is nullified, he works himself up into a frenzy of annoyance.

In Mildred Harris's description of him he is spoken of as not caring about public opinion, of neglecting to consider the cinema audience's demands. I cannot understand this statement, though I do not wish to say that Miss Harris has definitely no evidence for it. The other view, being one well supported by the

opinion of many in close touch with Chaplin, claims that he is a careful man, who has no intention of letting an unsaleable article leave his work studio.

I do not mean that his work is wholly mercenary, but to his meticulous mind a scene which will not appeal to the audience is intolerably wrong. He definitely subordinates his own wishes and desires, a course which demands intense self-discipline in a man of such pronounced individualistic tastes. Automatically, then, he produces an article which has a popular appeal. While his work is full of suggestion, he does not invite you to discover suggestive inferences. He is content to treat the public as mentally unsullied, even though human. He prefers to make his appeal universal, and always utilises universally understood themes.

His appeal on the surface is primarily to the heart, he is obviously a sentimentalist; but by means of his perfect technique, his amazingly skilful timing of a scene, the admirable poise and balance of contrasts, he proves irresistible also to the head. After seeing him at work I charge him with being practical, the last thing the pseudo-artistic director wishes to be thought. It has been stated that "A Woman of Paris" was the picture he enjoyed making most, because its appeal was more subtle, it was satirical, it was sophisticated. This is not true, because the only picture that Chaplin is ever interested in is the one on which he is engaged. He is perfectly willing to experiment, but he is equally willing to make pictures that have the greatest appeal, because his sympathies lie with the masses. "A Woman of Paris" made a handsome profit (£100,000), but it did not make enough money to justify the time spent on it.

Chaplin's practical nature enabled him to comprehend the situation perfectly. His production methods

involve, on the average, the delivery of one picture a year. That is enough to make him essential to the cinemas, and at the same time keep up his price. Hence his readiness to take advice from his distributors, whose hand is on the public pulse. Of course, he is practical. He never "kids himself" that it would be clever to produce a picture which is not negotiable. He may talk of a serious Napoleon and Josephine film, but no one in his studio believes he will ever make it, simply because it would be too much of a gamble. He may seem unpractical because, before his domestic worries caused him to leave California, he was as much as seven months behind his schedule. But to spoil a picture for the sake of finishing it on a certain date would be suicidal to his reputation. And so he continues in his own way, even though it may mean loss to him.

Chaplin lives only for the present. Miss Harris lamented that no external interest could deflect his mind from the picture he was making, and that he would spend hours reading and talking about the subject. I suppose that is accurate, for on the set he is torn with anxiety at every moment lest any scene should be wrong. He studies what he calls the psychology of a series of events and their effect on the public. He changes the whole trend of a day's work in a moment, if he feels the effect will be wrong. All his sense and his nonsense must be logical in development, and must not run counter to the atmosphere of the story. If a digression is allowed, it requires intensely careful treatment in order to compensate the audience for breaking the continuity.

It is thus that his work is different from the ordinary film-comedy. In the latter you have absurdity carried to the *n*th degree, and exhausting the audience physically

by making their minds leap swiftly and wildly from one idea to another. In Chaplin's work the effect of every incident on the mind of the average man and woman must be studied with care by all the studio staff. He gets a small piece of business filmed, and then sits down to envisage its effect on an audience not expecting it. He tries the sequence a score of ways, saying, "I wonder how it would look this way," and he will stand for minutes at a time miming silently, raising eyebrows, shrugging shoulders, gesticulating slightly with hands and arms, and uttering a few words or grunts to illustrate his movements. Thousands of feet of negative are shelved every week after the "rushes" (short length of positive film) are run through the projector in the private theatre. As much as 400,000 feet of negative, 200,000 from each of two cameras, may be shot to secure a final film 6,000 feet long. The rest has to be cut out.

There may be times when Chaplin tears himself away in despair from the studio and disappears for a week on end, or he may sit in his canvas chair, apparently sunk in gloom, when ideas refuse to shape themselves. He may tell interviewers that he is glad to be free of all restraint, that no one orders him about or tells him what to produce, and they may get the idea that he is an arch high priest of a new, fantastic type of art. He is, for example, intensely interested in all modern art movements, reads every newspaper and periodical that deals seriously with them, and 6,000 miles from London was anxious to hear of monthlies and quarterlies that would keep him abreast of new developments in England.

I advised the *London Mercury* as one organ; he made me promise to send it to him, and Mr. J. C. Squire, himself an admirer of Chaplin, fulfilled my promise.

Either despite or by reason of these traits, there is no one in Los Angeles or New York with a quarter of Chaplin's knowledge of what is required in a film. I saw no director more easily able to make the dumb tables and chairs, familiar clothing and make-up, and even semi-wild animals, express themselves in cinematographic terms. And yet, for all that, he is a slave, an absolute slave to the public, who eagerly await his films.

One man may achieve his self-expression without using conscious effort. A few strokes with the brush or the pen and a masterpiece is before you. Another man will only achieve what pleases himself and his public by laborious, self-sacrificing, arduous effort. Joseph Conrad used to dictate his work to a typist, and then take the sheets and rewrite them in his own manuscript. Chaplin is like that, except that he eliminates the typewriter and the typist. His continuity clerk used to sit idle, even drowsy, under the lemon-trees in the far-distant corner of the lot, her book and pencil neglected, while Chaplin, a few paces away, was considering the psychological effect of a flicker of his eyelid.

More often than not the schedule of a day's work would be represented by half a dozen headings on a half-sheet of notepaper, none of which would be followed. And why? Not so much because they did not fit in with Chaplin's mood of the moment, but because he could not estimate at that precise second their effect on the cinema audience.

Chaplin, of course, is aware of his own individuality, and he knows how the audience reacts to it. Naturally, therefore, his own idiosyncrasies play a considerable part in the picture; usually his first appearance in it is the signal for a burst of applause. But he leaves

nothing to chance, and he represses himself as vigorously as the most autocratic production manager would suppress the least important extra.

You need merely to study the timing of any scene in "The Gold Rush" to note how he studies cause and effect. Many a director would hold an effect a fraction of a second too long and ruin it. That is because he knows too little about an audience. Chaplin never allows himself to revel in a scene, however brilliantly conceived and executed.

You remember the builder's-hoist scene in "Pay Day," how Chaplin is sitting dinnerless on the ground and high up in the girders the foreman spreads his hot-dog on the hoist, which, while he turns away, suddenly descends and presents the derelict below with a free meal. It would have been easy to make this oft-repeated process a play between the two men. As it is, the hoist itself becomes endowed with life. It is like a helpless carrier of stolen goods, thrust hither and thither, not daring to disobey anyone, like the innocent party in a triangle drama.

Chaplin deliberately hands the laughs in that scene to an inanimate wooden tray at the end of a rope. The idea is comparable to the immortal coupling of a fiddle with the cat, and the flight of the dish with the spoon, because the cow jumped and the little dog laughed. Such conceptions belong to the most primitive, elemental form of humour, and as such are universally certain to excite a pleasurable reaction from the audience.

Such devotion to the study of cause and effect involves incredibly close application, and Chaplin abominates interruptions. He will break off a scene himself, but he objects strongly to strangers upsetting his schedule. Hence his genuine dislike of personal

publicity. All he cares about is his picture. In private conversation he opens his heart on numerous subjects—on marriage, children, work, amusement, his colleagues, business methods, and even the conduct of the municipality. He has a great contempt for the “graft” that defaces American public life. But American journalists are quick to turn any word he utters to the cause of “good copy,” often with disastrous results. And so he shuns them. But if he feels instinctively you are not going to write down every word he says regardless of its effect on his work and other people, he will express extremely interesting, outspoken views and sentiments on the film-business generally, and himself in particular.

Could anything be more ludicrous than the suggestion that his domestic discord is a publicity stunt? Chaplin is essentially the beloved of the family audience. Could anything be more injurious to his reputation in the eyes of the family public than the *débâcle* of his present marriage as luridly explained in the American Press? A prominent English exhibitor said to me, when all the revelations were being made: “Let Charlie look out, or his popularity here will be dead! He can’t afford to monkey with his reputation in this country. I know, because the patrons of my theatres talk to me about it.” That is significant comment on this extraordinary affair.

When Chaplin married Lita Grey, all the Californian papers sought to discuss his new venture with him as if it were a new film. Chaplin refused indignantly to see any reporters, whereupon they went away and damned him out-of-hand for a surly fellow and a boor. Now, there is nothing they love more than dissecting his emotions. It’s a queer world.

It is astonishing to a man such as Chaplin, who

has lived in a country where the Press are governed by contempt-of-court rules and may not discuss a case when it is *sub judice*. Particularly devastating is the effect of the publicity at a moment when the most important picture in his career has been hanging in the balance. Its effect is enough to ruin both his film and himself completely. Puritans here and in America decline to show the pictures of a man whose private life is being freely discussed, though what the effect of the one on the other is they never attempt to explain. It has been said that Chaplin is fond enough of publicity when it comes along. But it is usually his distributors who are responsible for his "personal appearances." They need the personal publicity, and they see that he supplies it. But I have said enough to prove where the man's heart really lies—in the secrecy of the studio, and there it will remain.

CHAPTER XVIII

STARS AND THEIR FANS

BEAUTY and good looks, male and female, abound in Hollywood. The place is a magnet drawing handsome men and beautiful *young* girls from all over the world, those with experience and raw recruits. Every European country is combed for likely people. You may see the lively, pretty, would-be film-stars careering along the wide boulevards in high-powered cars, bathing at Santa Barbara, Coronado, Venice, and Santa Monica, dancing at the hotels or waiting at the casting-offices, long lines of them. How they live at all is a mystery, for the cost of bare existence in Los Angeles is almost prohibitive according to our ideas, and the distance between any two studios, being a Sabbath-day's journey, makes a car essential. Still, there they are, and thither they will come. At the Central Casting Association, whence all the extras are engaged, every imaginable type of person—black, white, brown, and yellow; tall, short, fat, thin, pretty, and ugly—can be obtained in any quantity at a moment's notice. When they reach the set they are scarcely human beings at all. They are puppets of clay, put and thrust just where the director wants them, and carrying out extraordinary tasks without a glimmer of an idea what the work means.

A cynical film-executive said that the average screen-player was best described as "beautiful and dumb." She must be a "good-looker," but she must not be too independent—in other words, that the more brainless



LEW CODY.

A favourite screen *roué*.



MISS COLLEEN MOORE.

Who receives more "fan letters" than any other "star."

First National.

an actress, the more easily would she reproduce the director's ideas. The phrase is worth examination. By beautiful the speaker meant a beautiful camera subject. All depends on what the camera registers. As a matter of fact, the majority of film-stars are not conspicuous for their beauty—even the younger girls and the young men often lack really good looks off the film. Think over some of the big names, and you will find this an accurate statement. Even Valentino had a cauliflower ear. No director, however long his experience, I have been told, can pick, even with the aid of a bit of blue glass, a new film-face with any degree of certainty, and even the best-known stars have to undergo frequent screen-tests to make sure that their looks suit their forthcoming subjects, that they have not developed an unexpected wrinkle or two. This is the reason why the beauty competition designed to discover new film-faces is such a cruel farce.

They say adaptability is a useful quality for a wife to possess. It certainly is for a film-star. The film-face must be expressive and adaptable, and that is why real beauty is merely a secondary consideration. There are several extremely pretty girls who have become stars, but there are many more women who have reached "the peak of stardom" by the possession of malleable faces, which express emotions easily at the director's call.

No matter how beautiful you may be, if the camera takes a dislike to you, you are wasting your time trying to become even an extra. Some of the best stage actresses have failed on the screen for that reason. The world of difference that lies between actual looks and screen looks ought to be carefully weighed in any attempted revival of British film-production. You may find your potential thousand-pound-a-week

actress in the tea-shop, in the city office, in the kitchen. No amount of acting skill, no brilliant theatrical record will counteract eyes that are sunken a trifle too far in the head or that are extremely light in colour.

There is a highly paid young man whose popularity in the cinemas both in America and here has become astonishing in the last three or four years. I met him in Hollywood, and he struck me as being one of the most weedy youths I saw in all the studios. He was narrow-chested and round-shouldered. There was no sort of build about him. In a word, he was ordinary, insignificant. But put him on a screen *viâ* the camera and the projector, and hidden qualities in his make-up appear instantly. His eyes flash, his swagger sends a thrill down the female spine, he has a fine air. His "love-stuff" both tender and cave-man brand, is "the goods."

And the actresses—why and how do some of them win their popularity? It is absurd to say, as some have claimed, that publicity does the trick, though it may help. There are four prominent screen-actresses who have the vilest profiles imaginable. But they all make up for that defect by abundant vitality. Taking the screen all round, its most attractive attributes is its lively movement. Your star, therefore, can "get away with a lot," if she exudes vitality. There is something of an affinity here between the screen and the ballet. But the affinity is of the slightest, for, whereas you never feel any affection for the dancer—he and she is cold and detached, and you appreciate them more for their technical skill than for their human qualities—the screen-player attracts you until you find yourself in perfect sympathy with him or her.

Perhaps I should qualify this by saying that this affection grows up between the constant film-goer and

the player. I think this is highly remarkable, and accounts for the success of the non-beautiful actress on the screen. The public sometimes evinces affection for features that are absolutely horse-like in their gauntness. The circumstance merely adds one more element of uncertainty to the business, and proves how even the screen-test, important as it is, is not an infallible guide.

What about "dumb"? That is another matter. The word signifies in America stupidity, being short for "dumb-bell"—that is, half-wit. Of course, it is a libel, as most generalisations are. But what the coiner of the phrase meant is that the screen definitely calls for players with pleasing film faces and figures rather than highly developed individuality—persons, in fact, rather than personalities; players who are willing to be moulded without wasting time asking why. I take it that this is a usual state of affairs in any efficient commercial studio. Film-production is so highly commercialised that characterisation must be left largely to the director, and the player who wants to express his ego loudly and insistently is a nuisance, and usually ends in walking out of his job. Many a potential star has been lost because he or she could not get on with the directors or executives.

The main contribution of the player is himself or herself, not fancy theories on technique and effect. The director will tell the players that it is face and figure that the public demand in their screen-idols. In your cinema the female patron, having determined that the story is passably good, says: "Didn't So-and-so look lovely?" (Even though her looks offend all the canons of beauty.) "She was wonderful tonight, and *he* was divine." The American understands this point of view perfectly, and is willing often to sacrifice good

story treatment, even story itself, to the exploitation of the star. Often, too, the better player has to let film-beauty steal the picture. Consider this the next time you see what you think is a bad film.

The director is not his own master, being subject to the production committee, and he often has to forego many of his own pet ideas. Naturally, he is not going to let his cast ventilate their own theories freely; nor, except a few of the biggest stars, do the players claim the privilege. Both director and player gradually attain "picture-sense," which consists in knowing how to turn out the largest number of money-makers in a given period, and the star is indulged in direct ratio as he is a box-office draw.

The star-producer, such as Fairbanks, Chaplin, von Stroheim, Harold Lloyd, does not come within this category, because each of them has his own studio and does much as he likes as long as he satisfies his distributor. There are capable women, too—Miss Gloria Swanson, for example—who are their own producers and even organise their own finance. Miss Swanson impresses me as a woman of remarkable grasp of detail, especially of the film-business, and there is no denying her domination of any scene in which she appears.

But the ordinary members of the stock companies, divided into the two categories of "stars" and "featured players," are merely units in an army of workers, and the least temperamental and easiest to handle are often the most successful. I heard someone say once: "Menjou—there's an individualistic actor, if you like, an inventive genius. Every movement expresses himself. Every gesture is full of meaning. He lives on the screen." Now, the truth about Adolphe Menjou is almost exactly the reverse. Monta Bell, who was working with Chaplin when Menjou

sprang into fame in "A Woman of Paris," told me that the *svelte* polished Frenchman is an ideal film-actor because he is absolutely passive clay in the potter's hand. Menjou is a photographic plate always ready to take any impression the director wishes to have registered. He makes no suggestions, offers no criticisms, and causes no disturbance. He is totally devoid of temperament in the normal studio sense, and in only one particular does he ask for some latitude. That is in the matter of clothes. Menjou is an authority on male attire, and he does not require advice on it.

I do not wish to imply that Menjou knows nothing of acting; I am pretty certain he could direct a picture to perfection. He is unquestionably a great artist. But he knows that his success lies in the artificial polish which someone else produces on him, and he is fully content to leave it at that—at any rate, for the present. Why not? Chaplin paid him £100 a week in "A Woman of Paris." His salary today with Paramount Famous-Lasky is £800 a week all the year round, and he appears in four pictures each year. Some time ago he was offered by a new film-group (Bell told me) \$1,000,000 a year for five years, but naturally refused it, as there was no guarantee that he would enjoy the work. No successful actor of worth would tie himself up for five years on end.

Miss Lillian Gish and John Gilbert are two other players who delight the director. Valentino's success was obviously the result of his good film face and figure, and the skill of his director. No one would have ever accused him of being a good actor. Conversely, the good stage-actor rarely succeeds on the screen—John Barrymore and H. B. Warner are two prominent exceptions—because he resists the directorial influence. Barrymore succeeds because he deliberately subor-

dinates his own inclinations, and because he genuinely enjoys filming. Frankly, he does not like half the films he makes, and he positively hated "Beau Brummel," which is usually considered a pretty good picture. He told me once that he worked for films very largely because they were so lucrative.

It is the easily malleable, non-temperamental, phlegmatic player who is needed at the moment largely because the popular story does not call for much display of deep emotions. It is worth observing that most of the popular stars today are either comedians or players who suffer well in the strong, silent manner. Film-technique does not admit of much raging furiously together, simply because any exaggerated expression, when photographed, appears ludicrous. London dramatic critics displayed their ignorance after the first night of Miss Pauline Frederick's season in London by declaring that she used the exaggerated gestures of the screen to emphasise her acting. Gestures on the film can never be exaggerated because, first, the camera records more quickly, and with greater detail even than the eye, every movement, and causes every phase of the movement to be distinctly registered; and, secondly, the projector enlarges enormously the image on the positive film during its transfer to the screen. The screen-player is always compelled to restrain, restrain, restrain himself all the time. Many a stage-player, intent on becoming a film-star, indulges in fierce "emoting," and as a result his movements and expressions never gain true cinematographic quality, and become melodramatic, and the audience, thinking he is burlesquing, is dissolved in titters instead of tears. Miss Frederick, of course, was using a stage technique in exact contradistinction to screen technique, one that fitted the highly melodramatic mood of "Madame X."

The need for restraint means that the control of the situation passes more and more into the director's hands and the initiative of the player is destroyed, lest he should imprudently unbalance the film's scheme. All that is left to the player is to do as he is told, and take care of his personal appearance. Some star actresses have clauses in their contracts calling for the submission of every film and still photograph to them for approval before the finished article leaves the studio. They won't let pictures go out which make them look old and ugly. That is the only privilege left the poor dears. One player in Hollywood said to me that she was astounded that Lya de Putti had permitted the director of "Vaudeville" ("Variety") to film her with so many shadows on her face, which, though realistic enough, did not show off her features to the best advantage. Certainly the screen-players, watching "rushes" (short lengths of films straight from the camera), try to insist on the retention of those sequences which reflect their own bodily glory most effectually.

But they don't get much of a look in. On the set they have gone through the motions of expressing an emotion so many times in a single hour that they become hopelessly bewildered and lose their sense of discrimination between one portrayal and another. Beatrice Lillie told me, when she was appearing in "Exit Smiling," her first picture, that she had not the faintest idea what she was doing. It was double Dutch to her, but she had placed her faith in Sam Taylor, the director, and she knew nothing of filming anyway. She filmed just as she filled up her income-tax form, just hoping for the best.

The star on the set gets no more consideration than the extra, except that she may use a double to perform

risky stunts that would run counter to the terms of the insurance policy, which the company has taken out in her name, and she may sit in a canvas chair with her name emblazoned on the back. When called she rises from the chair gathering a beautiful gown round her, the arcs burn up, and she makes grimaces at the director, who stands "off" representing a threatening villain. Again and again she grimaces, and sometimes the camera records her efforts. Released, she flops down limp and wet with heat.

I remember watching a player—I think it was Lars Hansen—in a barrack dormitory scene in "The Flesh and the Devil."* He took off his vest and put it on about a dozen times before the director, Clarence Brown, was satisfied with the bit of business. Over and over again some little sequence of movements was performed. Even then, I believe, Brown selected as the final choice a shot made when the players were not expecting the camera-man to be turning, and when the film was completed the scene got crowded out altogether!

The marvel is that the players achieve any result at all in the muddle and confusion of the studio. There is no applause, no icy disapproval, no fixed hours of acting. They go on acting until the director says "Cut!" and then they go on acting again until he says "Cut!" again. Outside that studio-stage there are hundreds of other men and women doing the same kind of thing; there is no external sympathy, for which the actor craves. He may not know for weeks whether the film is a success or not. When he sees the final result, he may find that the part in which he appeared has been completely eliminated in the cutting. He may have played in some of the 95,000 feet of film that was

* See Chapter XXII.

pruned away before the ultimate 5,000 or 6,000 was selected. Yes, it's a disheartening business.

Do you blame the actress who turns for consolation to her "fan-mail," the letters that reach stars from "film-fanatics," or more shortly "fans," all over the world? One director told me that the worst part of his job was to try to counteract the influence of "fan-letters." Intelligent men and women actually model their performances on the advice given in letters from people they have never met, and the director quoted actual instances in which films had been definitely injured because the players, and he mentioned names well known all over the world, had listened to the advice of "their public."

Enterprising people in Japan have set up a profitable business supplying ready-written fan-letters to popular stars. Even if the Japanese "fan" cannot read the letter he is willing to send it, and for a small extra charge a book containing the names and addresses of all the leading screen-players is placed at the disposal of anyone who can read it. Many of the stars tear up the letters unread, but the more kindly disposed make their secretaries write appreciative replies, and it is not unusual for a star to send an expensive, mounted photograph to any odd person who happens to ask for it. The personal touch between the player and the public whom he or she never sees is a powerful influence, and the star is quite ready to believe that 300 or 3,000 persons are as important to her as the millions who see her pictures and never give another thought to her.

Few people in England can be aware what a film-star's (male and female) "fan-mail" means to him or her. Every star wants to let it be known that he or she is receiving the most letters in the studio. According to *Variety* (April 6, 1927), Miss Colleen Moore for

some time previous to that date had been receiving 15,000 letters and sending out 12,000 photographs every month. Miss Clara Bow was averaging 11,000 letters and sending out 8,000 photographs a month. First National, whose star Miss Moore is, declares that it costs 6d. to send out each photograph. Famous Players-Lasky, however, for whom Miss Bow works, say they have cut the cost to 2d. a time, and they are the only company which has a " fan-mail " department, whose job it is to handle all the letters of admiration addressed to the stars. The entire work of replying to the letters is taken off the star's hands.

Lesser luminaries have to pay their own " fan " expenses. *Variety* calculates that players such as John Barrymore, Monte Blue, Ronald Colman, and Tom Mix spend anything from £5 to £50 a week on sending out letters and autographed photographs to keep their " fans " happy. It is a queer business.

From the public's point of view it is the glamour surrounding the player that is the attraction, and it is really important to the star that the glamour should not be dispelled. That is why the Hays Organisation, which represents the interests of producers and distributors, is anxious to suppress scandal concerning Hollywood and desires to prevent the film-colony giving rise to it. It stands to reason that if unpleasant reports circulate about a leading lady who is always representing a beautiful, innocent heroine, the less educated public begins to find the situation incongruous and stops away from the cinemas. Temporarily, a scandal, worked up as a Press stunt, may lead to a momentary increase of attention, but in the long run the effect is injurious, and morality pays better.

CHAPTER XIX

SCENERY AND SETTINGS

THE scene-designer is a high-precision worker. Naturally, he has been taught that the camera is not easily deceived. You may build sets of canvas for the stage, and if the pass-door is opened and the canvas bellies in the draught, the audience is not seriously perturbed. A piece of scenery fell down during a performance of "And So to Bed" at which I was present in London, and Mr. Percy Hutchison's vigorous methods have reduced his "Brewster's Millions" sets to rattling, shivering lumber. But the camera will not endure such defects. The joins in flats on no account must be visible. Neat finish is all-important.

A film-man said to me that the carpenter and plasterer are steadily becoming the most important technicians in the studio after the camera-man. The plasterer, indeed, has often to be an artist of good qualifications, and today it is no uncommon thing to find that the most interesting feature in a film from an artistic point of view is the architecture or settings. The mode is usually stark realism, but there are signs that a higher form is being studied, and we shall see important developments as the influence of the Germans and Swedes makes itself felt. No self-respecting film-man can afford to neglect the scenic lessons taught by such a picture as "Metropolis." But progress will be slow, and it would be a mistake to ask too much at once. The public has to be carried forward slowly;

otherwise, the developments could not be turned to commercial advantage, and no American company would undertake any step which did not lead in that direction.

The Germans have led the way, and have lost money in the effort. The Americans take advantage of German experiments and perfect them. After all, that is good business, and the inventor always has to suffer for the benefit of posterity. Meanwhile, the American spends freely on scenery of the doll's-house order and concentrates on accuracy of detail.

Inspect one of the studios and observe how freely money is spent on settings and technical equipment. Then you begin to realise what facilities the principal companies afford their directors. Take the Metro lot, for example. Plaster and timber structures used as settings in every type of film cover acres of ground. Seen from any angle but the one selected for the camera, these queer-looking buildings, cheek by jowl with each other, look like a town that has been severely shelled. The frontage is there, but the back is a jumbled mass of boards, loose ends, props, ropes, and joiner's and plasterer's paraphernalia, like the back of the scenic railway at Wembley or Coney Island.

On the screen you will scarcely be able to tell that the street in Chinatown is built in Culver City, so correct is it in detail. "It's supposed to be Limehouse," someone said; "is it right?" Pretty good, I thought, after consideration, though the lamps and chimneys were not quite East London.

Another immense structure represented the pillared front of an orphanage, about 100 feet wide and 40 feet high in three storeys. It had been used for a picture entitled "The Fire Brigade," and the broken glass and blackened window-ledges told their own tale.

This set was more solid than most, the rooms represented by the windows being about 6 feet deep from the front and the walls made of asbestos-lined timber. The object was to accommodate the firing apparatus. It was not desired to have the whole building reduced to ashes; there was merely to be an outbreak of fire, and it was important that, though the flames should be real, the building should retain its shape at the end.

Here also were medieval castles with great flights of "stone" stairs, their centres made to appear worn with the tread of many feet; Chinese temples with elaborate *décor*; a windmill; the frontage and vestibule of a theatre; a Parisian boulevard café; a railway station in Germany with coaches standing on the lines, and an actual Pullman car.

Most of the sets are built of ply-wood on timber frames, strengthened and made more solid where necessary and decorated with plaster. Naturally, only what is absolutely needed is built, but even so the amount of timber required is gigantic. As much as 20,000 feet may be required for a simple small picture.

Scarcely any attempt has been made in Hollywood to suggest scenery rather than built it realistically. Whatever is subjected to the camera's scrutiny is built exactly as if it is part of the real thing. The clear, dry air of California enables timber and plaster sets to be left standing indefinitely, so that they can be used again wherever necessary. In a sense this is a pity, because it tempts the director to perpetuate the realistic style. And it is going to be a long while before he abandons it.

Sometimes I do not feel that the scene-designer secures as good results as he might, seeing what a free hand he has with the money. Take, for example, "The Beloved Rogue," the John Barrymore picture.

The realistic convention governed this picture, and no doubt vast sums of money were spent on reconstructing fifteenth-century Paris. But there was no mistaking the artificiality of the plaster walls. All the buildings were obviously "studio stuff." I have seen many pictures in which it was difficult to tell by mere inspection of the texture of the scenery what was real and what was plaster. I don't know whether Alan Crosland, the director, used the old cathedral set from "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" in "The Beloved Rogue," but certainly that scenery was infinitely more realistic than the streets and houses of the other. The long shots, of course, were admirable, especially those taken downwards from a height, but the close-ups were unsatisfactory. I would either save money by having such a scene suggested by a costume and a curtain, or I would demand some change in the composition of the plaster in order to get away from that matt finish which is so common in medieval settings. Perhaps the scenery is used too soon after it is built.

In a studio in Berlin I came across two enormous open coke braziers, 5 or 6 feet high, placed beneath a large piece of scenery to dry it off, as the director was anxious to use it quickly, and wet scenery would not have photographed well. It was a mighty risk, for a single spark might have caused a £500,000 fire. But you sometimes must take risks to save time.

It is extremely difficult to obtain exactly the right effect. St. Paul's Cathedral in 1700 was pure white from dome to ground level. A film-man in reconstructing seventeenth or eighteenth century London would probably make St. Paul's as black and begrimed as it is today.

The same difficulty does not arise with modern buildings, and it is easier to build with greater accuracy

of detail. I watched Jack Gilbert at work on "The Flesh and the Devil,"* a story of pre-war Germany, directed by Clarence Brown. He was playing the part of an orderly in the scene depicting the stables of a military academy. There was the abbreviated title emblazoned over the door; the stable with its symmetrically arranged groups of harness, saddles, and bridles; the immaculately groomed chargers; slanting beams of mote-laden light made to descend on the stable floor through non-existent windows; and not least important of all, the smoking manure-heap, on which much time was expended in order to secure the right density of exuded vapour. The artist will laugh at such banalities, but I can understand the public's attitude. A manure-heap does smoke. So why not this one? I confess that I find careful detail distinctly attractive, and many cinema-goers will no doubt agree with me.

I remember a film entitled "The Temptress" in which was shown a huge hooded Argentine tumbril with wheels about 9 feet in diameter lumbering across country behind a team of a dozen or more mules; the shape and build of those wheels fascinated me almost as much as did Miss Greta Garbo, the seductive player of the central character.

Realistic detail, unless absolutely banal, can be amazingly significant in a film, and I believe the great mass of the public are captivated by it. A carelessly constructed set may often wreck the general effect of a film; the public simply loathes sloppiness or skimping. In time we may educate ourselves to look further, and we may evolve scenic modes which are less expensive and provoke a greater æsthetic reaction. Instead of mere soothing pleasure, we may secure dramatic effects

* See Chapter XXII.

by suggesting scenery in a tragic sequence—a few lines and shadows to represent door, window, and wall—or a humorous design behind comic action. But I fear it will take time to make the public appreciate the idea.

I discussed the subject with von Stroheim, one of the more adventurous directors in Hollywood. He works more or less independently, financed by one group or an individual. It was Mr. P. A. Powers when I was there, and the picture was "The Wedding March," a huge spectacular production of pre-war Vienna, with von Stroheim as the principal player. I said: "Why build all this great cathedral interior, this fretted reredos, these life-size images, these solid pillars with deep groinings and elaborate capitals and finials? Why not a mere flash of some photo of an actual building, and then play the scene against curtains or the merest suggestion of a church? Surely, the saving of expense would be enormous."

I felt justified in rashly advancing such a theory, because von Stroheim had already exceeded abnormally his time and expense schedules, and, as a matter of fact, a halt was called a few days after our conversation in order that some definite plan could be evolved for bringing production to an end without more delay.

He admitted that much money might be saved by less realistic scenery, but he said the time was not yet ripe for a drastic change. "I distrust," he said, "any method of design other than the direct, not because I do not believe in expressionism or impressionism or cubism or any other mode, but because the public won't accept them as entertainment. I have been in this business several years now, and by experience I have got 'picture-sense.' I know what the public will pay willingly to



Paramount.

SCENE FROM "THE WEDDING MARCH."

A studio set representing Vienna.



Paramount.

STREET SCENE IN "THE WEDDING MARCH."

A wonderful example of a studio set.

see. If you bring along fancy ideas, you might as well give up making pictures, because no one will pay for your ideas.

“The film has won the reputation of defeating the stage in spectacle. Well, we must continue to beat the stage by outdoing its realistic scenery. There’s one of the reasons for solid stuff. Personally, I do not believe in trying to use actual locations; it’s much better to build reproductions. I might go to Schonbrunn for this story about the Emperor Francis Joseph. But fancy dragging a company over there, securing permission to use the castle for a couple of days, and then finding it raining. As to the devices for saving money or scenery by double photography, mirror projections, and so on, they are good as long as your technicians don’t spend too much *time* perfecting them. Time is more valuable than money, and if you are hung up because the mathematicians go wrong fitting your final picture together, you might as well have spent money building the whole setting solid.”

Certainly, von Stroheim spends money on settings—his cathedral was marvellous, and in the extraordinary spirit of publicity-seeking that pervades Los Angeles, a couple of studio hands were actually married before the high altar the day before I was there! No detail was missing to complete the ecclesiastical illusion—candles, pictures, crucifixes, statues, tombs, chairs, and benches.

No, there is not the slightest tendency to get away from solid building. In fact, if anything, the inclination is the other way. Some may remember the use made of the travelling camera in “Hotel Imperial.” The stage accommodating the hotel was one of the largest in existence, and eight rooms were built complete in every detail, four leading off each side of the lobby,

which ran the length of the building. All rooms, walls, and doors were built solid.

Suspended above the set were rails along which the camera, mounted on a little carriage, moved at the director's will. Scenes could be taken of each room from above from every point of view. Even the exterior of the hotel was built up. There were two objects—first, to enable Erich Pommer to experiment with angle photography, representing impressions of scenes taken from the point of view of a character watching the others. The camera was placed thus in all kinds of queer positions. Secondly, the story could be filmed in proper sequence. In most pictures all the scenes taken in one room are “shot” on one day, no matter whether they are consecutive or not. In “Hotel Imperial” an attempt was made to build up a cumulative dramatic effect by following the characters swiftly from one room to another.

For devotion to detail one should examine Chaplin's work. All day and every day Chaplin is wondering how this or that piece of scenery will affect the public. He spends hours considering the bolt of a door or the bars of a cage, wondering whether the detail is right, or if any little object, because of its unusual nature, will deflect the audience's attention from the main drift of the story. He knows how easily the average audience is put out of humour by an abstruse sentiment or the portrayal of a habit of life that is not universal. You never see an unconventional scene or effect in Chaplin's films. All his designs are obvious, almost commonplace. He uses nothing that the average mind will not fully comprehend, whether it be story, treatment, or scene. At the same time he never exaggerates for the mere sake of effect or to slur over a weakness.

The development of the large interior stage is remark-

able. To save time more and more exteriors are built and photographed under cover. All preparations are made beforehand, the journey to a distant location is avoided, and there is not need to search for a building to suit the script requirements. Everything that is required is erected exactly on the stage. Thus, an English red-brick country house, which could not be discovered in America, will be built complete with approach, flower-gardens, trees, and shrubs. The building of sets outside is only necessitated when they will not fit into the stage, or if much riding and driving is required across the scene. Even so there is scarcely a single scenic idea that cannot be reproduced on an interior stage.

One of the principal reasons for the favour shown the inside set is that electricity is more dependable than sunshine. The sun shines in California for nine months in the year. But unfortunately it, or rather the earth, is never still, and shadows change rapidly on a scene. A delay on an exterior set, and the lighting may be different in two scenes meant to belong to the same moment of time. So little is the sun trusted in Hollywood, that its rays are often screened off altogether from a scene.

On the De Mille lot I came across a shell-hole over which had been erected an awning of thatched reeds. All round the rim were arc lamps, the rays of which were directed on a couple of soldiers, who were supposed to represent a patrol caught in a barrage. On the Metro lot the stern of a submarine had been built up in wood and canvas, and a similar awning of thatch was erected above it. Lamps were scattered all round. The director carries round his portable lighting equipment almost everywhere in the interests of accuracy.

If he can secure his effect on a stage, how much

happier is he? Hence the growing popularity of miniatures. I came across a four-storey building representing a bank at a street corner complete in every detail, but only 5 feet high. Even the kerb was to scale. I saw a model forest, consisting of miniature pine trees planted on a green-brown board 12 feet square. It was charged with combustible material and bore a notice: "Keep off. This model is charged for firing." Later, it represented the required scene brilliantly. On one stage I found four workmen building a scene on the snow-covered Rockies with log huts, telegraph poles, and snow drifts. Shipwrecks, naval engagements, and sea storms are all reproduced with perfect scale models in tanks—for example, the blowing up of the *Maine* in the Spanish-American War.

As to the trick photography, this has to be carried out under special conditions, and most studios have separate departments to deal with it, the secret processes being carefully guarded. Thus, one may photograph a girl getting into a taxicab on Broadway, New York, or riding down Fifth Avenue, without her leaving the Hollywood studio. By means of such processes as the Schüfftan, the German invention, entire scenes are included in the films without constructing all of the background.

The Schüfftan process is interesting; it is used to portray action against some historic building, the reproduction of which in the studio would be extremely costly. Suppose you want the Kremlin as a background. Either you build an accurate scale-model of the edifice about 9 inches tall, or you use a specially good photograph. You place the model or photograph out of the camera's field of vision, and a few feet in front of the camera you hang a mirror, which reflects the model or photograph.



Gaumont.



Ufa.

SIMILAR EFFECTS OBTAINED BY DIFFERENT METHODS.

In the upper picture, the dance-hall scene in "Hindle Wakes," the whole building was photographed, complete with an audience composed of several thousand of the general public.

In the lower picture, a boxing contest scene in a German film, the Schüfftan mirror process is used, all above the wavy line being "faked."

The silver backing on the lower half of the mirror is removed, so that the reflection makes the Kremlin seem as if 6 feet of it nearest the ground has been cut off. The camera can now register action through the plain glass, and further away on the studio floor the actors play a scene against a set constructed to represent the 6 feet cut off the Kremlin. The studio mathematicians work out the detail and proportions so accurately that the composite film-photograph makes it appear that the actors are in very deed playing in front of the Kremlin.

Excellent use was made of the process in "Faust," "Metropolis," and "Vaudeville," and only an expert can detect in what scene it was employed. The results are infinitely superior to those obtained by similar fake methods used in American pictures, the elaborate scenic backgrounds of which are often artificial in appearance.

There is no doubt that settings do play an important part in the success of a film, and it has often been a fault in British films that there are too few changes of scene. A generous use of contrasted locales, exterior and interior, helps to eke out a mediocre story—at any rate, for the less sophisticated audience. The British producer often cannot afford numerous expensive settings, and that is where the extensively equipped studio has the advantage. Unattractive backgrounds and conventional shadows—note the importance attached by the American to a detail such as the angle of entry of the sun's rays into a room—have often turned the balance against a picture. There is little demand for expressionistic lighting or staging, but a lack of cheerfulness in design and form puts the audience in the wrong mood. Innumerable films require sets representing comfortable American homes, either in

the city or in the hills. A little extra adornment, the impression of a spacious lounge-hall looking out on a flower-garden gained momentarily when the door of the room holding the action opens to admit a new character, creates in the mind of many a "film-fan" a feeling of comfort and ease, which he or she finds extremely pleasant. The film-fan's own surroundings are too often bleak and comfortless, and they relish the atmosphere of the contrast.

The English audience approves the American setting also for its novelty and its bright cleanness—like a polished tray fit to carry a thrilling mystery. A wealthy Londoner said to me once: "My gardener and my groom go to the pictures every week, and they tell me they like the American pictures best because American scenery, American railway engines, motor-cars, houses, cities are novel and interesting. They know their own countryside and their own small town so well they like to see someone else's for a change."

But, of course, there is more in it than the presentation of the actual scenes. There is something in the way they are handled, a slick *svelte* technique, which repels the exacting critic and attracts the average film-goer. Such a technique, which may be described as obvious, has contributed much to the popularity of American films.

Americans are often blamed for mistakes in scenery, especially when it represents European countries. It is by no means uncommon to make these mistakes on purpose in order that the American audience should not be disturbed unduly by unusual settings. When Ernst Lubitsch made the film-version of "Lady Windermere's Fan," he used a set in every way representative of a typical Mayfair drawing-room—the large tall double doors, the heavy cornice, the

elaborate mantelpiece. Those tall doors stuck in the American audience's throat, and were severely criticised by the exhibitor as incorrect, or at any rate stupid.

The average audience has fairly rigid ideas as to what scenery should be used, and whatever is expected is always provided. That is "picture-sense."

CHAPTER XX

GERMANY

GERMANY has earned two reputations in the process of her film-production. It has become the custom to say that what comes from a German studio is the best, even if it is not always saleable all over the world. It has also been stated frequently that the German industry is the most efficiently organised, and goes to work in the typical thorough German fashion. Neither of these reputations is wholly justified. Germany has given us some fine film-work—parts of “Faust,” “The Last Laugh,” “Vaudeville” (“Variety”), and parts of “Metropolis.” But I believe the finest examples of screen-art so far have been Swedish.

The Swedes were the real pioneers of the better film. They spent money freely, having the backing of the wealthy match-manufacturing group in Stockholm, and they produced films that have not been excelled for beauty. There is some affinity between the German and Swede in art, and I think they taught each other something. They exchanged players and directors—Gösta Ekman, for example, who played Faust so brilliantly, is a Swede.

Unfortunately, the Swedes omitted to pay their way. They did not realise that the true secret of film-making is to concentrate on both quality and quantity. If you ruin your patron, or sicken him, in a few years, you can't get another patron so easily. The Swedes failed to realise that the world is a somewhat cynical

place. In the film-studio you must put your pride in your pocket half the time, and give the public the pabulum they need. Then in the other half of the time you can set about educating them to eat caviare. That is the secret of the American's success. The public will not digest a continuous diet of "Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness," "Love's Crucible," and "The Atonement of Gösta Berling." It is a pity, but you may as well admit it.

The result was that Swedish production was reduced and the Americans swamped the Scandinavian market, meeting little resistance. The best Swedish directors, such as Victor Seastrom and Mauritz Stiller, went to America, and "were helped in their choice of story and treatment" to make successful pictures—you know what that means—and gradually most of the stars followed.

The German situation is parallel to the Swedish in that German films were no more saleable abroad, but in other particulars it is entirely different. Germany tried to solve her film-situation by the help of the politician, always a risky proceeding, and to some extent she succeeded. It should be remembered that European film-producing was handicapped, not so much because most of the nations spent five years in warfare as because they were impoverished after the war, while their great rival, America, was immensely rich. Dearth of money is a tremendous obstacle in film-production, and it is natural that in most European countries the film-makers, their national pride stung by the American monopoly, should seek help from their Governments.

Nowhere else in Europe did a Government respond so readily as in Germany, for she needed every ounce of self-advertisement after her crushing defeat in the war. The first method tried was a species of subsidy. The

German Government persuaded the Deutsches Bank to back the principal company, Ufa (Universum Film A.G.) to the tune of many millions of marks, and when this proved inadequate, embarked on the artificial respiration method to prevent Ufa being swamped by American competition. If not enough German films were being made and shown, it was necessary to provide some inducement to increase the number.

Accordingly, the German Government threw into the balance the "Kontingent" law, which compelled all German distributors to acquire a full-length home-made film for every foreign film they intended to put out. The effect was to induce the production of numerous German pictures, for the American distributor, as well as the German distributor, had to acquire German films, or he could not obtain release for his own. Certainly, the studios were kept busy, and, as the law is still in force, there are always between 200 and 300 German pictures made every year (in England the average annual output is thirty or forty). As, however, the law does not compel the cinemas to show the "Kontingent" pictures, there is a risk that poor pictures may be made, simply to fulfil the law—mere footage, in fact, which the distributors might regard as representing trading loss, and put on the shelf rather than offer to the cinemas. The "Kontingent" arrangement is not an ideal solution to the problem.

Against this, has to be remembered the fact that Germany, unlike England, prefers often a second-rate home-made picture to a second-rate American picture. It is only necessary to make fairly good films to be able to show a profit on them. The Americans have greater difficulties to contend with there than in, say, Great Britain; for example, the language. Every word has to be translated into German. Also German

sentiment is less akin, as a whole, than English sentiment to American sentiment.

Moreover, Ufa were better equipped to meet American competition than many producing companies in other countries, and better able to distribute the forty or fifty pictures they made annually, and the hundred or so others made by other producing units, simply because they owned 130 picture-theatres in various parts of the Reich. They own at present fifteen in Berlin, including the Ufa Palast am Zoo, holding 2,200, the largest picture-theatre in the country. Even so they have not been able to pay their way.

The only reasonable conclusion is that their organisation has been defective—about as defective as ours in England. It seems almost incredible that with a virtual assurance that half the programmes in German picture-theatres might be German, Ufa could not make ends meet. The financial position was extremely bad in the early part of 1926, and an £800,000 loan at $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. was secured from Paramount Famous-Lasky and Loew Incorporated on the security of the big Ufa headquarters building near the Potsdamerplatz, one of the finest and most expensive sites in Berlin. In return, the American companies obtained certain distribution by Ufa in Germany of forty or fifty of their pictures every year, and agreed to take a few Ufa films for America. The money did Ufa little good, for the Deutsche Bank collared it, and cancelled a large proportion of their holdings.

Nevertheless, though Ufa had inadequate means for fresh expansion, they had to continue for the sake of their theatres and to fulfil the "Kontingent" obligations. They projected and built the huge new studio at Neubabelsburg, the largest in the world, and continued production on a large scale. It was a long

tale of extravagance, inability to adhere to money or time schedules, and failure to please the picture-theatre public. One year, for example, was allotted for the production of "Metropolis," and it took two to make it. "The Last Laugh," though so clever a piece of screen-craft, did not please the exhibitors. There was no successful effort made to turn out a steady supply of pictures which would bring in a good revenue.

Ufa ran through an enormous amount of money, and no fresh supplies could be obtained either as a subsidy or as a loan from the German Government. Debts piled up, and early in 1927 the position was again critical. The great headquarters, which comprised the huge Vaterland café on the ground floor (pre-war name, the Piccadilly), a picture-theatre, and vast ranges of offices, was sold for £1,000,000 in March, and Ufa moved to the Kochstrasse to less pretentious surroundings. It seemed astonishing to the outsider that this step had not been taken before. No doubt, it ought to have been taken earlier. The immediate effect was that Adolph Zukor, of Paramount, paid a visit to Berlin, and Ufa secured better terms for the distribution of their pictures in America than under the old agreement. But, though the £800,000 debt was paid off by the sale of the building, there remained little capital for future development—the old trouble again.

The new group which has undertaken to put Ufa on their feet again is led by Herr Hugenberg, the Berlin newspaper proprietor. It has been stated that his appearance on the scene portends a monarchist flavour in future Ufa films. But I think most people are agreed that it will be a case of business first. Everyone hopes that Herr Hugenberg and his lieutenant, Herr Klitsch, will introduce stringent business methods into the conduct of the company, which will ensure some

kind of success to it. It would be a thousand pities if the German studios, from which the Americans, as they would be the first to admit, had derived much inspiration, ceased to make pictures.

The technique of "Vaudeville" ("Variety"), for example, was a revelation to America, and the picture ran two months at the Rialto on Broadway. The extraordinary success over there on the "The Waltz Dream," a light comedy, took New York by surprise. The last day of its fortnight's run at the Capitol in New York realised 13,000 dollars. The public revelled in it. The success of these two pictures was further evidence that the climate and atmosphere of California were not essential to good picture-making.

As a matter of fact, the Americans could not afford to see Ufa stop production, for they would then have to make some of their own films in Germany to fulfil the contingent obligations.

When I was in Hollywood I discussed with Erich Pommer, then working for Paramount, and formerly the managing director of Ufa, the state of European films. Mr. Pommer believes that the German film-industry's crucial turning-point was reached when the American companies lent that £800,000 to Ufa. If only the bank had agreed to stay the course, Germany would have emerged in 1927 as a strong film-country. By withdrawing at that moment, the bank alarmed all other financiers, not only in Berlin, but in London and other great money centres, and it has been increasingly difficult ever since to secure backing. European film-concerns, in Mr. Pommer's view, have always been just too short of money.

I have been told in Germany that Pommer failed because he attempted to do too much himself. Originally at the head of the administrative side of the

business, he undertook also the general production supervision as well, and was largely concerned in planning "Vaudeville" ("Variety"), "Metropolis," "The Last Laugh," and so on. There is no doubt that he knows more about the film-business than any other man alive. He has been in it since, as a boy, he worked in Léon Gaumont's Paris office in the early days of the present century. His experience is tremendous; he did not jump into pictures for want of a better job.

He is all in favour of more interchange of ideas and personnel, and declared to me that the film's development was being hindered by the insularity of the nations. Thus Paramount wanted to send him to Berlin to make pictures, but the Germans thought that such a step would be unpatriotic. B. P. Schulberg, Paramount's associate production manager, told me that his firm wanted to make films of British subjects—for example, "Florence Nightingale" and "Gungha Din"—both in England and in the British Dominions but he was doubtful if British sentiment would approve.

That brings me to a subject being freely discussed on the Continent—especially in Berlin at the present time—the Pan-European idea. Rightly or wrongly it is felt that there may come a time when American pictures will not be so welcome in the old countries as they are at present—when, for example, the newness has worn off them. One should be prepared for all possibilities. There are numerous subjects likely to appeal to European countries which evoke no interest in America, and are never tackled there.

The present aim of European producers is to tap the large lucrative American market. If you can obtain "American release" for a picture, you are pretty certain to make money. But it is extremely

difficult to secure "American release," because America already produces hundreds more films than she can possibly absorb. No American firm will take half a look at a European film unless it is a cast-iron proposition, and how many of them are there in the world? Neither "Vaudeville" ("Variety") nor "Metropolis" would have got into the American market except for that agreement between Paramount and Metro and Ufa. I believe the Americans were much surprised at the results.

It may be advisable to drop this policy of trying to please America. If a big European alliance could be formed, not so much to counter the American invasion (though that would be an incidental result) as to ensure release for European films in Europe, the lot of the European producer would be much happier. It is all very well to say, "Make a good film, and it will gain a market for itself." But the film-industry cannot be built up on one film; it is the steady output of winners and the steady booking thereof that means good business. I suppose there are about 10,000 cinemas in Great Britain, Germany, and France together, and potential markets in the British Dominions. A well-organised corporation might build up a great business in that market.

I have been told that the great problem to be faced is stories—how to get stories suitable for all European countries. After seeing hundreds of American films, I do not believe that the story is the main problem. The pictures that succeed are often entirely deficient in what is called a good story. If ever there was a good story in the original matter on which the film is based, it is chopped and changed about so much during filming that little remains.

More often a film succeeds on its treatment, and that

is what we need to study. No one in England, as far as I know, has the foggiest idea what treatment means. There are some Germans and Swedes who understand it. Take "Vaudeville." There you had an ordinary enough triangle story. Positively banal it would be in magazine shape, but, when treated and shaped into cinematographic form, absolutely transformed. Knowledge of right treatment constitutes that "picture-sense," which is the ability to determine what will stir and attract an audience. Without it, no one can make films successfully.

I should say a few words about German studios, and for that purpose I intend to mention only two of the many producing centres—Neubabelsburg and Staaken, both just outside Berlin. There are half a dozen or more other film-studios in and near Berlin, and the Emelka Company make pictures at Munich. Ufa owns the Neubabelsburg studio and another one, less modern, at Tempelhof. Neubabelsburg is finely placed, a good thirty minutes' run by car from the centre of Berlin, in the pine woods close to the beautiful Wannsee, where everyone goes yachting and bathing in the summer.

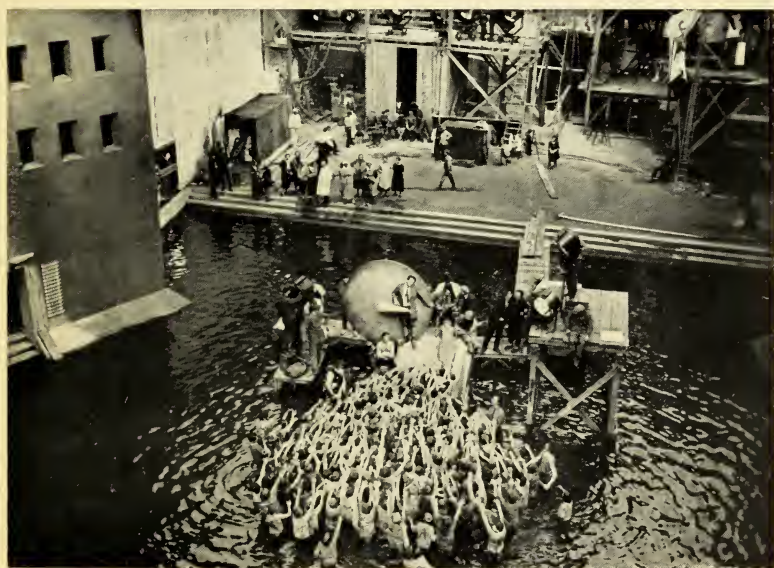
Here is what I believe to be the largest studio stage in the world. It was only completed early in 1927; in fact, when I was there in May, 1927, the transformer plant was still being erected. The dimensions of the whole building are 400 feet long, 184 wide, and 46 high, which is longer and taller than anything I saw in Hollywood. It is divided into three large sections by immense sliding doors, which rise the whole height of the building, so that the full length can be used or the section isolated for separate productions. There are practically no windows except narrow slits, and the entire interior can be darkened as required.



Ufa.

UFA'S NEW STUDIO: THE UFA SHEDS AT NEUBABELSBURG.

The largest "stage" in the world.



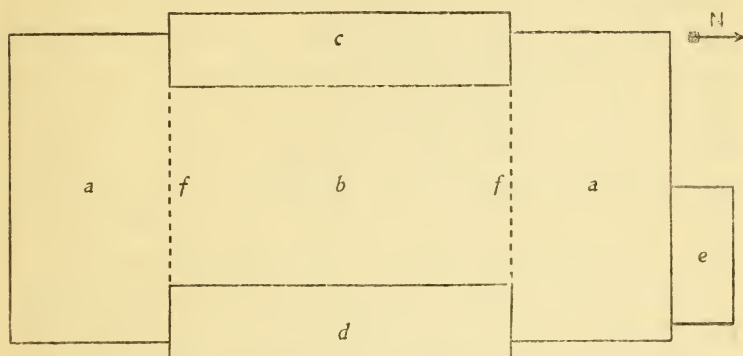
Ufa.

FRITZ LANG DIRECTING THE FLOOD SCENE IN "METROPOLIS."

Note lamps on operating platforms.

A feature of great interest is the dressing-room accommodation, which is arranged on the first floor above the main entrance in the centre of the building. Each room has a different colour scheme of decoration, its own bathroom, and a mercury lamp installation, in order that the player can make up in the same light as he or she will find on the studio floor.

The acreage of the studio is very large, leaving plenty of room for the erection of solid sets. I saw some of



PLAN OF UFA'S NEW STUDIO AT NEUBABELSBERG, BERLIN.

Area, 60,438 square feet.

- a.* North and south floors, each $98\frac{1}{2} \times 184$ feet. Total area, 36,248 square feet.
- b.* Middle floor, 118×205 feet. Area, 24,190 square feet. Height, 46 feet.
- c.* Cellar for heating and stores.
- d.* Wardrobe, dressing-rooms, director's offices. Forty-eight rooms in all.
- e.* Electric plant, dynamos, etc.
- f.* Fireproof sliding-doors.

the huge exterior sets—*e.g.*, the cathedral—used for “Metropolis.” There is also a small zoo on the lot, and all the usual executive offices, workshops, developing and printing plants for preparing the “rushes” (the short lengths of film used by the director to see how his work is progressing), power and transformer station for the whole studio, and the usual appurtenances. On another small stage I found remains of

another "Metropolis" set, the tiled passage in the great works.

I was shown a beautiful plaster model of an Eastern palace about 9 inches high and a couple of feet wide, which had been used for the Schüfftan process of cinematography which I described earlier.

The Staaken studio is a different proposition. Twenty minutes by car from Berlin, it was once a Zeppelin shed, which has been converted into a studio. Workshops have been added at the sides, and in many particulars this gigantic building, about 850 feet long and 40 feet high, is well suited for filming. It is owned by the Film Werke Staaken g.m.b.h., which lease out space to anyone who wants to make a picture. When I was there four companies were using space, but as many as eight have worked there at one time, six of them with full sets. About seventy pictures are made there in a year.

The studio syndicate supply material for sets, labour, lamps and "juice," and properties as required. The various companies bring their players. Herr Dieterle was working with his own company on a set representing a Thuringian church. Messrs. Fellner and Somló, working in conjunction with Gainsborough of London, were making "The Ghost Train" with a German cast, except for the English supervisor, Guy Newall, who was also playing the lead. An exact replica of Long Parrish Station on the Southern Railway was standing in the studio.

Herr Manfred Noa was making a film of a Balzac story with Paul Wegener in the lead. Pan-Europe of Vienna was making a picture entitled "Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of a Woman," with the Berlin stage star, Erna Morena, and Harry Liedtke in leading parts. The scene was a Nice hotel, and a large set, built solid, was being put up to represent the Casino at Monte Carlo.

CHAPTER XXI

MODERN TREATMENT AND TECHNIQUE

IN the construction of the film-story there have been many changes since that day in 1896 when Robert Paul displayed his "Shoeblack at Work in a London Street" within the austere walls of the Royal Institution. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this development would be to describe a few modern pictures, and draw some conclusions as to the future of the film-story on the screen.

I suppose that the most striking developments within the last five or six years have been in treatment and technique. Even the most feeble story can be made interesting by treatment, and practically no subject under the sun, no play, novel, or story, is absolutely devoid of filmable matter. In every studio are men and women whose sole job is to write or suggest treatments, but the main fault in films today is that the treatments are not yet adequate. The dramatists and novelists who smart under the insults which film-folk administer to their work are usually the victims of treatment-writers, who have just failed to combine in correct quantities the two requirements in a film—appeal to the film-public, and a true artistic sense of situation, characterisation, and *décor*.

The pictures I am about to describe all contain elements representative of modern life—rapid movement, swift, restless change of scene, continuous display of intense human vitality, and a certain ruthlessness

and lack of consideration—without which no film can hope to stir young people today. And yet so varied is the scope of the film that, though these pictures are poles apart in treatment, technique, and effect, they are all equally absorbing.

“The Cruiser *Potemkin*,” (directed by S. M. Eisenstein for Sovkino in Moscow) is avowed Soviet propaganda, designed to reveal the heartless brutality of the Tsarist tyranny.

“Am Rande der Welt” (directed by Carl Grune for Ufa of Berlin), an outstanding German picture, is a passionate plea for pacifism, in which attention is paid to symbolism, architecture, and scenic design.

“Hindle Wakes” (directed by Maurice Elvey for Gaumont of London) is a British producer’s successful attempt to make entertainment out of a distasteful outmoded play, which once aimed at expressing the revolt of youth against convention.

“The Flesh and the Devil” (directed by Clarence Brown for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Hollywood) is a late product of an American studio, which displays all the Americans’ technical resources, is intended to be 100 per cent. entertainment, and will prove not a little shocking to seekers for pasteurised amusement. Indeed, every one of these films is unsuitable food for babes. But each attains to a certain distinction, compels thoughtful attention, and illustrates powerfully the growth and development of the film.

The Soviet Trade Commission kindly showed me “Potemkin” when I was in Berlin in the early summer of 1927, and an official informed me that it is only the first part of a vast film, still in production, designed to spread Soviet doctrines all over the world. The picture as I saw it is, therefore, broken off abruptly. In order to see the film I was taken into a small pro-

jection room, the walls of which were entirely papered with Russian film-posters, many of them highly Socialistic in tone. Most of them were artistically far in advance of anything used in this country, where distributors always make a point of choosing the most inartistic methods of advertising their films.

A copy of the picture has lain in the vaults of Film Booking-Offices in London for eighteen months or more. The Government did not wish it shown during the coal strike of 1926, and later, I suppose, the censor held it up. If one or two of the shooting incidents were slightly modified and sub-titles were written with great care, the film could certainly be shown here without offence. At any rate, some private performances ought to be arranged, and all studio staffs ought to take a compulsory "Potemkin" course. When shown in America, the film was ruthlessly cut. In Berlin it had a good run, undisturbed by the authorities, because the Mayor of Berlin at the time, being a Socialist, thoroughly approved of it.

The story, as many know, describes a mutiny in the Russian Navy in 1905, in which sections of the population of Odessa joined the rebels. The revolt was sternly repressed by Tsarist Cossacks, who were said to have shot down the demonstrators without respect for age or sex. The opening scenes show the sailors of the *Potemkin* complaining about the bad meat, which swarms with maggots—a gruesome sight under the magnifying glass—and the commander ordering it to be made into soup. Insubordination ensues, and the captain orders an example to be made.

A dozen ratings are selected to be shot, and a tarpaulin is thrown over their heads as they huddle together terrified, some kneeling, some crossing themselves. An aged, bearded priest appears in a companion-way,

elevates a silver cross and prays. A squad of marines are lined up, rifles in hand; the petty officers storm and curse; the order is given to fire, and the marines refuse to obey. Mutiny breaks out, the men leave their ranks, and after a fight with the officers and petty officers, murder them and throw them overboard.

The last symbol of hated authority is the chief petty officer's heavy, horn-rimmed pince-nez, which remain dangling from a davit as their owner is hurled into the sea. One of the sailors is killed, and, falling overboard, is suspended by a block and tackle just above the water. The sailors, who have headed for Odessa, decide to make a hero of the dead man, and secure the body just as it slips out of the ropes into the water. They take the dead man ashore, and lay him in state on a jetty at the extreme end of the long stone mole.

Meanwhile, the city is in a ferment. Seething crowds, young and old, bourgeois and peasant, fill the streets, wild speeches are made, and revolutionary flags are unfurled.

Many embark in small boats and carry out provisions to the crusier—eggs, bread, live poultry, and pigs. It is an animated scene, suggesting the arrival of a liner at an African port of call, from which the natives put out to barter their wares with the passengers. The sailors are delighted at their reception, and the townsmen are thrilled with the excitement of congratulating these pioneers of the new liberty.

Thousands of revolutionaries form a procession, and march in file along the breakwater to the jetty where the body of the dead sailor lies. They pay homage to the hero, light candles and pray. Meanwhile word of the uprising has reached the authorities, and as the demonstrators return to the city they are held up at the foot of a broad flight of stone stairs,

200 feet or so wide, across the summit of which is an awe-inspiring line of Cossacks with peaked caps and white tunics. Their rifles are carried at the ready, and as they begin to descend the steps they begin to fire. Each step they take in perfect unison they fire a volley, and a scene of indescribable panic and nameless horror follows.

Many of the civilians are half-way up the steps, others turn at the bottom, and are pressed back by the seething crowds that follow. A child of five or six is shot through the head and trampled underfoot in the rush. The distraught mother picks the boy up and advances towards the Cossacks pleading for help. She rolls backwards, riddled, her precious, bleeding burden falling from her paralysed arms. The steps quickly become a shambles, no one attempting to help the wounded.

A young woman, abject horror in her face, tries to shield her baby in a perambulator. Suddenly, with a frightful gesture, she clutches her stomach and dark stains pour over her hands. She falls backward and involuntarily sets the perambulator in motion down the steps. It bump-bumps its wild way between the writhing and dead bodies miraculously remaining upright, while the baby screams in terror. As it nears the bottom of the flight the vehicle turns over and crashes out of sight.

A group of women hide behind the stone balustrade on one flank of the steps, and every now and then, very venturesomely, one puts up her head to see how the fight is faring. Meanwhile they all try to console each other and encourage the younger and more terrified girls, cowering piteously behind what shelter they can find. One middle-aged woman, perhaps a head school-mistress, with large pince-nez similar to those

worn by the *Potemkin's* petty officer, risks a peep over the stonework just as a volley is fired. A bullet tears away one of her eyes, leaving a ghastly, blackened hole. She falls back among her friends, who are already in paroxysms of hysteria.

The scene changes back to the *Potemkin*, where most of the crew are seen resting carelessly in the officers' quarters. The ringleader, a burly, thick-necked, bulldog, alone is busy and nervous. Word comes that the rest of the fleet are at sea, and there is danger for the rebels. The alarm is given, and the sleeping sailors are roused. The ship is set in motion and partially cleared for action. The machinery begins moving, first slowly and then faster. Engine telegraphs revolve, smoke pours from the stacks as coal is shot into the furnaces, cylinders and pistons react to the pressure of steam, excentrics on the cam shafts revolve like a man rubbing his hands together in a circular motion, all the time faster and faster.

Guns are tested on their mountings, the barbettes swing this way and that, the muzzles are elevated and depressed, shells are brought up and laid on the decks behind the small-calibre weapons. The whole ship's company takes its cue and its time from the ever more swiftly moving vessel. The enemy are sighted, men's eyes are glued to the range-finders, the gunners are at their stations.

Then fresh excitement. It is discovered that the other ships have also joined the revolution and have disposed of their officers. Instead of pouring shot and shell into their own countrymen, the *Potemkin's* crew line the rails and cheer their fellow-rebels, and the cheer is returned by the crews of the other ship.

The propaganda in the film is really of secondary importance for any student of cinematography. And



Sovkino.

MASSACRE SCENE FROM "THE CRUISER POTEMKIN."



Sovkino.

DEAD BOY IN MASSACRE SEQUENCE, "THE CRUISER POTEMKIN."

from the public point of view it is a poor sort of advertisement for the Soviet and its methods. The ship's officers and the Cossacks appear in a terrible light, but the murder of the officers is no less repulsive. The effect of the propaganda on any non-Russian audience would not be what the Soviet seeks. The general impression would be: "Well, thank Heaven we don't live in Russia, whether under Tsar or Soviet."

Of course, the propaganda could be intensified by inflammatory and provocative sub-titles, and the exciting music used as accompaniment when the film was shown in Berlin was said to create a considerable effect on the impressionable. On the other hand, careful editing could make it harmless enough for exhibition in this country.

The really amazing thing is that "*Potemkin*" has been shown in Egypt without let or hindrance from the British authorities. It is not good for England to see it, but it doesn't matter about Egypt! Can anyone beat that as an example of political censorship? As I wanted to examine the picture from the film point of view I was glad to see it "cold"—that is, without music—and without sub-titles, and, as a matter of fact, the need for a sub-title was only felt once or twice throughout the whole length. The weakest part of the film is the too obvious propaganda of the other ships joining the rebels. There is a thrill in not knowing what will happen, but, when it is clear that there is going to be no fight, the story peters out; and would not the other ships have signalled their acceptance of the revolution before they got within hailing distance of the *Potemkin*? It is surprising that the climax is so weak, unless one should make allowance for the fact that the picture is only the first of a series of films on the subject.

Technically, the film is wonderful. I do not recall more graphic scenes than the opening shots on the cruiser. The nagging petty officer diving amid the hammocks full of naked men, inconsiderately waking one sleeper and prodding another as he searches for someone; the steady growth of the revolt, exemplified in the protests against the bad meat; the preparations to shoot the sailors; the aged priest, beating out the time with his crucifix—one, two, three—before the marines are to fire; the gradual disentanglement of the sailor's dead body from the block and tackle encumbrances and its slow subsidence into the water; the illegal congregation of the Odessa folk, and their solemn procession along the mole; the hideous detail, superbly contrived, of the slaughter on the steps; the relentlessly moving, ever-quickenning machinery on the ship.

Taking the film for what it is, the proportions are exact. The balance and matching of the sequences is remarkable, and some symbolical meaning could be read into almost every incident. The maggots, for example, are like human parasites; the unimaginative petty officers, once sons of the people, and now slaves to rote and custom; the priest representing the inadequate old religion, submissive to the rulers; the machinery driving the ship of state into the arms of other revolutionaries; the strong ringleader waking up all his assistants, who are inclined to slack off before the job is completed; the waving muzzles of the guns, like the feelers of a plant seeking room to expand.

The types chosen to portray the characters are perfect. Russian films are all made by a state department, and the producer is assured of co-operation wherever and whenever he needs it. Clearly the crowds are not ordinary extras. They seem to be actual citizens, who

would take part in this film as a duty to the state. Their mien in the breakwater scene—one of the most effective in the film—betokens this spirit. Professional actors appear in the principal rôles, and very capable they are. The handling of the mobs is highly imaginative.

For pride of place in grouping and scene composition I would give the palm to one or two “ shots ” in Odessa Harbour. There are, of course, no architectural features worth mentioning, but Mr. Eisenstein and his camera-men seem to be able to endue a staircase or a hatch with special significance. The only real fault in the picture is a tendency (probably necessary to the purpose of the film’s sponsors) to hold a scene a trifle too long. The timing could be rectified by careful editing.

“ Potemkin ” is at once the most sensational, ruthless, realistic, and fascinating film I have seen. It has no conventional form or beauty. It despises the cult of unity in drama. The action consists of a series of incidents only lightly strung together, and in the accepted sense of the word today there is no continuity. The film shares with “ Beau Geste ” the distinction of being devoid of love-interest, and it further offends the canons of entertainment by ending unsatisfactorily and indefinitely.

The motif is political bias, another *bête noire* of the ordinary film-maker, and it aims at being a sociological tract, demonstrating the iniquity of rule by brute force. In this process it becomes itself brutal, revolting and shocking, never pausing to think of effect on an audience as long as it is expressing its meaning distinctly. “ The Cruiser *Potemkin* ” is one of the few films that veritably make you catch your breath.

“AM RANDE DER WELT.”

“Am Rande der Welt” (“At the Edge of the World”) is a slight but singularly beautiful film. Carl Grune had, of course, proved his ability before he made this picture. Some years ago he gave us “The Street,” a penetrating study of a middle-aged bourgeois, who becomes bored with his home, and goes out into the city’s night-life to seek excitement. Unfortunately, the exhibitors and the public of this country conspired not to accept this film, and the director has been stigmatised as a high-brow, who could not make a popular picture.

In some ways the exhibitors were right. “The Street,” admirable as the character-drawing and scene composition were, was hopelessly depressing—one of the worst crimes the film-producer can commit. The inferiority complex of the main figure was altogether too insistent. In “Am Rande der Welt,” Grune demonstrates again his knowledge of human beings, but the subject is less static, and, despite its didactic nature, he is able to introduce elements more acceptable to the average audience. He has, for example, a definite ongoing story.

The theme is constructive, creative. War, he shows, is futile and wrong, and the sooner we realise it the better. All the characters are intensely human and naturalistic, and the subject is supremely alive, because Germany is still contemplating ruefully the effects of the world-struggle. In a word, the subject is eminently topical, and that is one of the most valuable characteristics a film can have. The picture asks the unanswerable question: Why should harmless people be disturbed by war, and their lives and livelihoods be endangered?

Almost all the action of the film passes in and near

an old windmill, which is on the border between two nations. The miller, a wide, gnarled, severe old man, as foursquare and solid as his mill, lives in it with his daughter, his two sons, and the wife of one of his sons. As the film opens, preparations are being made to celebrate the tercentenary of the mill. The owner is preparing to entertain his neighbours; there will be feasting, and the meadow near the mill is covered with roundabouts and all the paraphernalia of the show-ground. The local brass band arrives and conducts the miller, dressed in his Sunday best, to the fair.

The one sinister note is the presence of a spare-hand whom the miller has taken on temporarily. There is a mystery about him, though he seems a worthy young fellow, and an affection grows up between him and the miller's daughter. He is continually in secret conversation with a gaunt pedlar, who frequents the neighbourhood, and we begin to see some connection between their presence and the strategic importance of the mill on the high ground between the two nations. Indeed, the jollifications at the fair are interrupted tragically by the announcement that war has been declared. The good folk, hardly knowing what war means, fold their tents and fade quietly away. The miller returns to his home with his family, and the spare-hand descends secretly into the cellar of the mill and begins testing the telephone he has installed.

A nameless war has broken out. The uniforms of the troops who commandeer the mill give us no clue as to their identity. Their steel helmets and rifles are shaped in a style never seen before. They are a hard-bitten company; professional mercenaries they might be. "I am making bread for the people," declares the miller stoutly; "why should I be disturbed?" Why should his daughter-in-law be alarmed by the

tramp of soldiers, as she awaits the moment when she shall give birth to her child ? Why should his son, who has protested against the high-handed behaviour of the troops (" Are they animals ?") in taking over the mill, be imprisoned and prevented from receiving food from his father's hands ? Why should the young girl be insulted by the captain, who will release her brother at a certain price ? Why cannot they be absolved from taking part in a war which is unsought and unwanted ? The mill standing between the two countries is an institution essential to the welfare of both. Let it be neutral !

One of the young officers takes pity on the wistful, beautiful girl, and helps her brother to escape from the guard-room. They watch him go over the hill-crest through the shell-bursts in the only direction he can take—into the territory of the young officer's enemies. It is a serious step for the officer to take; he is risking his life for the girl; he may be called a traitor, if the plot is discovered. But he does not care. He must continue to carry on his military work until after the war; then, perhaps, he will come back to the girl, and enjoy the happiness of this neutral zone, where nationality does not exist. So they plight their troth.

And so the story (and the war) goes on. The telephonist is doing his secret work well. The old mill is a fine ranging mark. The shells burst all round it, but it escapes miraculously, so it seems. Gradually the net begins to close round. The captain begins to suspect wrongly that the young officer and the girl are in communication with the enemy country, and rightly that they have helped her brother to escape. The shells plough up the ground round the mill, and finally the destruction of the mill is decreed by the captain to secure respite from them. The spy and his telephone

are discovered, and a fight ensues over the girl between him and the young officer. Ultimately the enraged captain orders the mill to be fired before it has been evacuated, and the spy, faced by the troops, ends his life.

The pregnant woman is carried out tenderly by her husband and father-in-law, and placed in a small shack, and the girl is rescued from the burning building through a window just in time. Together the family watch the destruction of their home, but even while they watch they prepare to set about rebuilding it. They begin immediately, mentally at first, to repair the damage of war. It is the law of nature to rebuild.

Architecturally, the film is a triumph. The atmosphere of the mill is recreated with astonishing fidelity—the designs, for example, of the passage between the bedrooms and the main grinding-room, with its cumbrous, old-fashioned wooden machinery, its sacks of flour and grain. The characterisation is vigorous and true; the miller, admirably played by Albert Steinrück, is a living symbol of honest work and labour. The two sons are as pillars supporting the house and family. The girl introduces the poetry of life: her lissome body; her pure, young face; her swift, gazelle-like movements, expressive of that rapid, modern life which affects the dwellers even on the edge of the world.

The rôle, played to perfection by Miss Brigitte Helm, is amazingly well suited to her personality, and much more sympathetic, though less spectacular, than her part in Fritz Lang's "Metropolis." Miss Helm seems to possess exactly the right temperament for a film-player, and she has a perfect camera face. It is difficult to take one's eyes off her.

Other characters are no less distinctively played, and the photography is superb. Grune and his

camera-men have an excellent sense of grouping and of timing entrances and exits. There is a fine balance in the scenes, and the whole edifice of the film is accurately built. There is none of the rugged, unconventional treatment observable in "Potemkin." The film is unified by the presence of its all-pervading theme, and no sequence is allowed to obtrude and destroy the balance.

From the English point of view the penultimate sequence is sententious and over-stressed. As the excited family watch their home burning, the unconsumed beams assume the form of three crosses, and the young mother murmurs: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." But this is a slight and remediable fault in a powerful and intelligent film. The picture is transparently, laudably sincere. The director has something to say and do, and he says and does it. And it is better so than saying or doing a thing to secure an effect which he knows to be untrue, and therefore gratuitously shallow.

He goes further, for he is not afraid to attack fiercely the narrow nationalism of the past. For him it is more important that the young officer should be moved to help the girl's brother to escape, to render an immediate service to an individual, than be governed rigidly by his military discipline. There are more vital things even than war and national patriotism. It is a theory more advanced than the ideas found in the usual type of film, and while it would be unacceptable to many, it will rivet the attention of all to whom war is a palpable crime.

"HINDLE WAKES."

I do not think there can be many people who enjoy the story of Stanley Houghton's "Hindle Wakes." The film therefore starts with the handicap, serious



Gaumont.

THE ROUND-TABLE CONFERENCE SCENE IN "HINDLE WAKES."

From left to right: Miss Estelle Brody, Miss Marie Ault, Humberston Wright, Miss Irene Rooke, and Norman McKinnel.

for any picture, that the story may not be popular. Here you have a mill-girl, who spends a week at Llandudno with her employer's son, and when both his parents and her parents insist that they shall marry and she be made an honest woman, she refuses to have anything more to do with the young man. She goes back to her bench, and finds consolation in the prospect of a visit to the pictures with a boy in her own station of life.

There is none of the moral instruction of the German picture. There is no moral at all. The story is a slice of life. You might read something like it any day in an Oldham or Bolton newspaper. Up to a point you admire the girl: she does not ask to eat her cake and have it; she demonstrates her independence; she does not build her future on convention. But she does not wholly please. She is selfish and unfilial. She is a baggage. There is no romance about her. As a film-figure she does not amuse us.

Mr. Maurice Elvey's treatment is interesting, and, though there are faults in detail, as a whole the film succeeds. There is no false sentiment—a tremendous asset—and the story is told sincerely and without banalities or bathos. Mr. Elvey contrasts skilfully the revolving wheels and moving machinery of the mill with the revolving wheels and moving electric lights of the Blackpool switchback railway, where the girl and her friend are found enjoying their holiday. The huge dance-hall with two or three thousand couples swaying to the music; the seashore and the distant lights; the holiday spirit; the young men seeing the girls to their lodgings, and the farewells and good-nights on the door-step—here we have authentic, cumulative effect, significant and purposeful.

It is remarkable how full of symbolism many films

are today. In the Russian and German pictures I have described every character and scene has some deeper meaning. In "Hindle Wakes" this is so to a less degree. Clearly the atmosphere of the opening sequences are designed to suggest a certain freedom, even a laxness in behaviour, but also a certain relentless fate, which pursues those who do not practise self-restraint. It is skilfully interwoven in the story, and not unduly stressed. Mr. Elvey keeps his story going at a good speed all the time, and, though it is somewhat complicated by the untimely death of the mill-girl's factory friend, which leads to the discovery of the escapade by the enraged parents, the audience is fully sustained up to the climax.

It is here that the film loses some cinematographic quality. The refusal of the girl to marry her lover is announced at a round-table conference at the boy's house. His furious father and doting mother are faced by the girl's deeply offended parents. I don't dare to suggest how to avoid a long scene in which half a dozen rather boring and long-winded people sit round a long table and reach the play's climax after a long harangue, explained by a long series of subtitles. But I do know that this scene does not belong to true film-technique at all—it is pure theatre, and therefore inadmissible. Good dialogue on the stage would make this scene tremendous. (Incidentally, I believe Mr. Elvey's real love is for the stage, not for the film.) To treat it in the film in terms of dialogue is clearly wrong. Therefore, despite the capital acting of Norman McKinnel, Miss Marie Ault, John Stuart, and Miss Estelle Brody, I feel that the process of drawing that final decision from the girl should have been evolved differently.

Certainly, the study of modern film-treatment

generally is astonishingly interesting. The director is handicapped severely, because he must translate every phase and scene into action, and no matter what sort of action it is, the treatment must be lively in order to appeal to the modern audience. In the old days you could tell a film-story in a definite series of isolated scenes strung together by standard sub-titles. Now, the technique is much tenser. Fresh scenes and new characters are often introduced merely to explain an important sequence, because the average film-audience is disinclined to supply missing links from its own imagination.

Authors hardly make adequate allowance for the difficulty of translating their situations into film-form. Neither novel nor play will translate literally, and except in very rare cases ("Beau Geste" was one), much of the original must be ruthlessly scrapped.

I have dwelt on the climax scene in "Hindle Wakes" more to illustrate the process of treatment-writing than to blame Mr. Elvey's otherwise excellent film. It is certainly one of the most thoughtful and imaginatively directed British pictures, and illustrates the steady progress being made in this country. Also it is one more nail in the coffin of that bogey that the English climate is unsuitable for film-making. Many of the finely photographed Blackpool scenes were taken on a day when there was no sunshine. They are more than adequate.

"THE FLESH AND THE DEVIL."

"The Flesh and the Devil" is in many ways a remarkable picture. So far it has not reached England, and has only been shown in America, where it proved a big hit, especially in New York, but provoked hostile criticism from some newspapers and from religious

organisations. It was thought too frank and too sensual, certain incidents were considered to be lacking in restraint or good taste, and the title was attacked. Yet I suppose everyone would have to admit that the moral it contained was sound—meddling with another man's wife must cause a disaster.

Curiously enough, it was the attempt to call a spade a spade and avoid false modesty which caused the picture to be criticised sharply. In most American films the story pretends that no emotion is displayed between eloping couples until a marriage service has been read over them. Here it is indicated as plainly as in a French farce that the man and woman dispensed with such formalities, while the story does not become any more pretty because it is the woman who is continually the tempter. It is a pretty plain attempt on the part of the producer to kick over the traces, and I can imagine the production committee went about as far as they dare.

"The Flesh and the Devil" is a good example of an American film, composed of numerous ingredients prescribed as likely to appeal to a wide public. The student of the film will find the details more attractive than the story, which is somewhat obvious, and it is these with which we shall deal. The story, which is of Sudermann origin, starts in a German military academy, where two cadets, devoted to each other since childhood, when they had sealed themselves in a blood-bond, are undergoing their training.

The atmosphere of the place is well reproduced—irksome reveille, first parade in the vast barrack square, a wild prank, which results in the two friends being given a spell of stable fatigue, preparations for going on leave, the German railway station, greetings on arrival by relations. One is transported easily into the

spirit of nineteenth-century Prussia, as the characters drive away from the station in two-horsed landaus and victorias.

The main theme opens as Leo, one of the two cadets, comes face to face by chance on the station with Felicitas, a girl whom we place at once in the "fatal beauty" category. Subsequently, they meet at a ball and the sex motif becomes intense. Neither director nor player leave anything to the imagination in the scenes which follow. There is the most ardent, unabashed love-making, which the enraged husband of the lady disturbs. There is a duel, the husband is killed, and Leo goes to Africa for three or four years to allow the affair to blow over. Felicitas is commended by Leo to the charge of Ulrich, his friend, who promptly marries her, being unaware of the woman's real nature, and believing that the duel has arisen over a gaming quarrel.

Felicitas secures Leo's recall, but does not tell him that she is married. He returns full of terrific longing for her—the wheels of the train, the engines of the ship, all seem to sing the same song, "Felicitas." He discovers that she intends him to be her lover, while she also retains her husband. He finds her irresistible, but his friendship for Ulrich is too great, and he tries to find solace in the companionship of his mother and Ulrich's young sister.

Gradually Felicitas draws him back to her. She has neither the will nor the desire to let him remain apart from her, and an elopement is planned, which is discovered by Ulrich. The two friends agree to fight a pistol duel. Felicitas, urged by Ulrich's sister, sets out in the snow to prevent the fight, and while crossing a stretch of frozen water is engulfed and perishes. At the same moment the friends are levelling their

pistols at each other, and neither can pull the trigger. The spell is broken by the death of the ironically named woman, and a final somewhat unsatisfactory scene suggests an understanding between Leo and Ulrich's sister.

If you know Miss Greta Garbo and her acting you will realise that she does not spare herself in her extravagant encounters with John Gilbert, who plays the lover. I suppose the picture on that score would be dubbed "a hundred per cent. sex," and it certainly deserves the title. Miss Garbo is an alluring person. Mr. Gilbert and Lars Hanson, who plays Ulrich, are attractive actors. They achieve the atmosphere both of brotherly affection and of ultimate rivalry, and they are skilful screen lovers. They know their business well—Gilbert was the leading player in "The Big Parade," and Hanson did well as Dimmesdale in "The Scarlet Letter" (Hawthorne). He is a Swede; so is Miss Garbo; Gilbert is American. There you have the first elements of the popular success of the picture. Strong sex appeal, well handled, and an international cast.

The "fatal woman" theme is introduced skilfully, and maintained without destroying absolutely our affection for Felicitas. The first flirtation scene at the dance is good. Towards the end there is a very daring church scene. The old pastor (played by George Fawcett), who knows the circumstances well, preaches strongly on the subject of Uriah the Hittite, but this, though alarming Felicitas, does not prevent the family staying to communion. When the cup is passed round, the clergyman gives it a slight twist after it has been partaken of by Leo; but when Felicitas receives, she twists it in the reverse direction, so that she shall drink at the same spot which his lips have touched. In

the frustrated elopement sequences Miss Garbo maintains a hard brilliance, presenting Felicitas as a mixture of self-indulgence and cunning with all the tricks of the accomplished deceiver. No, there is no doubt about the sex interest of this picture. It is worked for all it is worth.

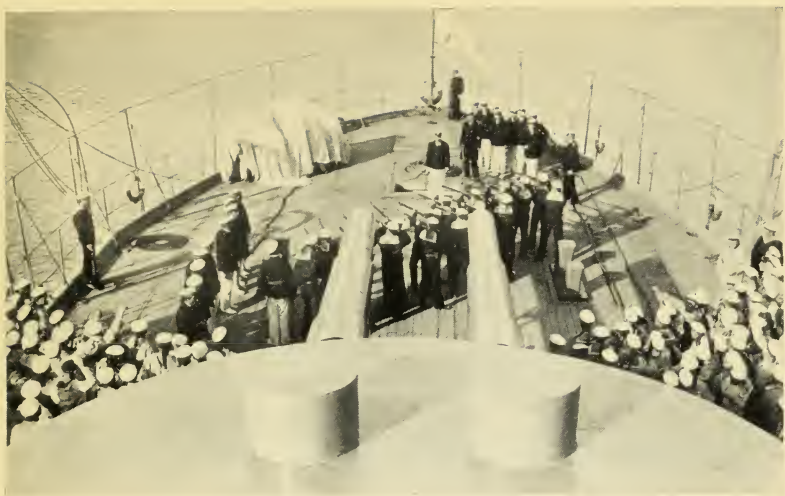
Turning to the technical work, we discover one really outstanding scene. The first duel is photographed in sharp, black silhouette. The camera is placed below the brow of a hill facing the light, and on the crest appear two little groups of three men, the duellists and their seconds. We see the former removing their coats, selecting their weapons from the case of pistols, and receiving instructions from one of their friends as to the signal for firing.

The seconds then run back on the far side of the hill out of sight, the duellists step back out of the picture, one to the left and the other to the right. The signal is given by a single man in the middle of the scene, smoke appears on the edges of the picture from both pistols, and the seconds come running up to the duellists over the skyline. The whole of this sequence is carried out in silhouette, and we do not know who has been killed until in the next scene Felicitas is depicted choosing her widow's weeds at the costumier's, careless of the havoc she has caused. The contrast between these two sequences is excellent, the silhouette idea being an especially intriguing novelty.

The snow scenes also are good, but in one particular betray the secrets of the studio. Leo and Felicitas are walking through what seems to be a steady but light falling snow. Just as one of the scenes is cut a flake larger than others comes to rest on his cap. It is unmistakably a white feather! You don't find much real snow in California.

In one or two particulars success is more limited. The backgrounds are generally not good. There is too much "drop cloth" atmosphere about them. German mountain scenes, ancestral castles, the distant island, on which the friends are to meet for their duel, are unreal, and the director needs to evolve a better method of combining the solid scenery against which the action is played and the flatter upper backgrounds. Another weakness, surprising because old-fashioned, is the superimposing of the girl's face on the corner of the scenes showing Leo in exile to indicate that he is thinking of her.

The picture illustrates distinctly phases of the general development of the film. It acknowledges the help of previous pictures—compare, for example, the blood-bond scene and the opening scenes of "Beau Geste." No pains are spared to secure the right effect for the military academy setting, particularly in the matter of the gigantic barrack square. The picture is essentially one into which the audience can glide without using a mental effort. It is not an ideal picture, for the weak frailty of both man and woman is not ideal. But it produces a certain feeling of lively anticipation, for which much credit is due to the cast. Although you can forecast the end, you find that you cannot deny yourself the pleasure of seeing the picture through, if only because you never know what fresh, startling mystery Miss Garbo will present before you. And if you are a "fan," you will know that you are watching the screen's most seductive and beautiful siren, which may well be enough entertainment for you.



Sovkino

EXECUTION SCENE, "THE CRUISER POTEMKIN."

Sailors to be shot are huddled under tarpaulin.



Ufa.

WINDMILL EXTERIOR IN "AM RANDE DER WELT."

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT.

Of these pictures two, "Potemkin" and "Am Rande der Welt," were shown to me in Berlin "cold"—that is, without musical accompaniment. "Hindle Wakes" I saw at the New Gallery in London with an excellent score arranged by Fred Kitchen. While watching the two former in the German projection-rooms I kept wondering what sort of music I wanted for them. I assuredly did want music, though I enjoyed watching them in silence.

And yet, so absorbed was I that I particularly did not want the usual type of musical accompaniment—all snippets, breaking off in the middle of a phrase to change to something else in alleged conformity with the mood of the fresh incident. I did not want "Cavalleria," or "Samson and Delilah," or "Pagliacci," or "Carmen," or "Tannhäuser," or the Venusberg music. I did not want the "March of the Priests," or "The Lost Chord," or "Pale Hands," or "Ain't She Sweet?" I was certain that what these and all other good films require is a special score written specially for them.

Without the slightest compunction an American company will spend from £50,000 to £100,000 on a picture. But they never dream of spending another couple of thousand on having a really effective score written direct for the film. The most they will do is employ a pretty good musician to string together a selection of snippets from opera, chamber music, and jazz, putting against each snippet the length of time it has to be played and the cue from the picture. The result is usually chaotic. Half the time your attention is being diverted from the screen by a semi-involuntary attempt to remember whether that bit is from "Aïda"

or "La Bohème," and as for the atrocious habit of stopping dead in the middle of a bar or phrase, what better means could be found to smash the unity of the picture's theme or shatter an impression that a scene-composition is imprinting on the mind?

No, we must have music written for every important film. I do not say that existing music cannot be used, but it must not be used, however good or suitable, if it injures the film. It must be used only if it fits exactly in length to the sequence it is accompanying.

Moreover, specially written music will ensure the elimination of another atrocity—the "effect." Some musical directors seem to imagine that every time a soldier puts a bugle to his lips, every time a pistol is seen to be fired, every time a door slams or a train whistles, some corresponding din must be created 20 feet away from the screen in the orchestra-well, and the results are usually ridiculous. Effects are all very well for a slap-stick comedy, but to a good picture they are an insult, especially as the orchestra goes on playing and pays no attention to them.

Every incident which is greeted today by some outburst from the "effects" man has some meaning in the film. The shot that is fired, the train roaring round the curve leading to the broken bridge, the alarm-trumpet in the camp—each of these is a "high-light" in the film, and the musician should use them as pegs on which to hang his score. He should express the sounds in terms of music. About the only really effective "effect" I ever heard was the maroon just before the end of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," which signalled the hero's death on a war-patrol, and I believe that succeeded mainly because a period of dead silence ensued in the theatre; the orchestra did not play, and a hush fell on the audience.

The actual flash and explosion were always too startling. The subsequent silence could be felt.

In many a cinema today which boasts an orchestra one might just as well put a series of gramophone records. Why not? Why waste money on making a set of fairly competent performers tootle out a string of hackneyed tunes, three minutes on the average to each? It is the inadequacy of the accompaniments and the hopelessly opposite musical ideas prevailing in cinemas playing the same film which has prompted the film-producer to study the new forms of mechanical music.

The vitaphone, to mention but one of these devices (phonofilms, movietone, and acoustic films are some of the others), leaves still much to be desired. The amplification often seems faulty, and the swell effect sometimes partakes of the nature of the roundabout organ, but the results achieved have been very popular in America. The vitaphone is really a large-size gramophone with organ-pipe attachments into which are put records of music synchronised with screen action. The advantage of the vitaphone is that the producers (Warner Brothers own the device) are able to send a canned musical accompaniment, made under the best possible conditions and with the best possible artists and musicians, to any picture-theatre playing their films.

Here is where your special composer would be invaluable. I can imagine what an enormous asset a special score for "The Gold Rush" would be. Chaplin tears his hair when he hears of wrong accompaniment being given to his pictures, and he turns in despair to mechanical devices to give him the accompaniment he wants. The composer would conduct his own score for a film before the vitaphone recording machine, and the public would be given the accompaniment which was absolutely right.

THE FILM-STORY.

What is required in the film-story? I can only answer that difficult question briefly and by referring to the four pictures I have mentioned. The worst crime the film-producer still commits is to be dull and stupid. All these four pictures avoid this charge. None is dull, and there is very little stupidity. None of the directors has pandered to an unintelligent taste by creating an effect which he knew to be palpably wrong. "Potemkin," obviously, is wholly sincere. So is "Am Rande." The others are largely so.

The public see through the false picture pretty quickly. The Americans have been the worst offenders in this respect. They distort a theme to make it conform to their own ideas on the subject, and in the process the value of the story often disappears altogether. It is pleasant to find that much of the false sentiment is disappearing, and this progressive development is due as much as anything to the success of pictures which tell a good story in a real manner.

Speaking generally, the combination of "heart interest" and the star system is still a fairly safe formula for the picture-theatre's amusement. The love-story is the main plank on which the business stands. If it is strong, the picture's success is fairly certain (how difficult it is today to find a strong love-story!); if it is weak, the picture must be tricked out with spectacle or stunts. Primarily, the film-public are interested in persons rather than things. That is why the most ordinary triangle drama-film is usually more successful than the finest scenic or natural history picture. Landscapes are regarded by the box-office patron as useless, except to put behind the hero and heroine, and tech-

nical processes on the screen are too much like instruction. The public are conservative in their tastes.

They like fairly obvious stories. They dislike symbolism, hidden meaning, and even *double entendre*, unless quite elementary. They prefer happy endings, they enjoy spectacle, as long as it does not supersede story, and they dislike horrible and morbid incidents. Static impressionism they consider dull, but they react at once to a swift tempo and cumulative effect, two characteristics which more than anything are lacking in many British films. The film-fans do not enjoy anything that is obscure or uncertain, and chiaroscuro lighting is, therefore, not popular. It is fatal to mystify the public unless you assure them that you are going to enlighten them before they go home.

Such conditions imply that the film-director is somewhat severely limited, and that actually is the worst problem he has to face in his work. Nevertheless, there is a perceptible tendency in the direction of expansion and development of themes. The public will accept films sometimes such as one would least expect them to appreciate. The pictures I have described conform to the regulation pattern up to a point. In "Hindle Wakes" and "The Flesh and the Devil" definite efforts have been made to create an appeal to what is considered the average audience's intellect. But in addition there is an attempt made in them to offer either a new idea or a new technical process. The experiment does not always succeed, but it is important that it should have been made.

The difficulty of determining beforehand whether a film will be successful is increased, because the public is fickle and inclined to run like sheep after pictures of unequal merit. People in England and Scotland will attend a picture-theatre showing an Ivor Novello film,

no matter how poor the quality may be. Novello is good enough for them. And that means you have a long journey to make before you can persuade the public to analyse every film they see, make up their minds for themselves whether it is good or bad, and then choose the good in preference to the bad.

If you compare European themes with American themes, you cannot help being struck by the undue preponderance among the former of gloomy and introspective ideas. One is often asked: "Why do the Americans score more popular successes?" I believe the main reason is that the Americans, at the risk of not being sincere, use light, cheerful subjects more frequently. What the British industry needs more than anything is to discover a Harold Lloyd or a Tom Mix, who would put genuine light entertainment into the day-by-day programmes of the picture-theatres. The success of Lloyd and Mix is proof positive of the need for their pictures. Why should we not help to supply such a need?

Gainsborough Pictures, who have made most of the Ivor Novello films are among the most progressive British producing units. But they seem to have an incomprehensible horror of tackling a light theme. They seem obsessed with the idea that the Americans hold a monopoly of comedy—and that, in spite of the Chaplin brothers' success and the popularity of a German picture such as "The Waltz Dream." Indeed, most of the picture-theatre "fans" in England are crying out for release from gloomy subjects. That does not mean that they want the abolition of the dramatic subject; drama will always be popular. What they do not want is heavy-handed treatments.

CHAPTER XXII

APPRECIATION

THE question of public taste in entertainment is one of the favourite topics of the day. The people are told what they ought to like, blamed for indulging stupid fancies, accused of leaving their brains at home when they go to the theatre, and generally browbeaten by alleged experts whom no one bothers to answer. Criticism, professional or otherwise, today is extraordinarily inefficient, mainly because it is insufficient. Taste is created by an attitude of mind. It is not enough, therefore, to criticise the public taste in entertainment. If no one is troubled by the general conduct of mankind, what is the use of criticising one of its secondary whims? Belabouring one extremity when the whole body is sick is rightly said to be an out-of-date method of correction.

As long as education and the object of life generally is almost wholly utilitarian, as long as the majority of mankind lives a hand-to-mouth existence, and as long as the Stoic philosophy is discounted by everyone—priests in the pulpit, Prime Ministers, public orators, and writers—so long will the mass of people seek the easiest mode of pleasure, and feel absolved from all effort.

We have to make allowances for the fact that the pursuit of happiness—the cheerful smile philosophy—daily urged by all who influence the mind of the masses has been thoroughly popularised. The modern philo-

sophy of the newspaper, unfortunately the only philosophy the common man reads, deliberately discourages him from struggling for a nobler self-expression. He is told "Do your work well, of course, but when it is done you are entitled to be taken out of yourself." Was there ever a more disturbing or pernicious teaching? He is told further that his life is "drab" and "colourless," that his work is monotonous and "galling," that the speed of modern life is "terrifying" (I am quoting—from memory—from Mr. James Douglas); in other words, that he is a good fellow whom life treats hardly. Do you imagine with this kind of doctrine ringing in his ears that he will exert himself to study a finer philosophy, to be interested in "advanced drama" or better films? Give him the primrose path, is his sentiment.

It is an amazing thing that no one expects newspapers to maintain a high standard, but the theatres and cinemas are always being urged to raise the tone of their entertainment above a commercial level. You find intellectuals, such as Dean Inge and H. G. Wells, definitely writing down to the level of the popular taste for articles on lip-sticks, and nymphs and modern girls, and short skirts and the difficulties of marriage, and many of these clever writers salve their consciences by "taking it out" of the places of amusement. I would offer to make quite good films of average stupidity based on the uplift "middle" articles in the daily papers written by "names." They approximate closely in true worth to the average "society" programme-picture.

Is not the American and German "uplifter" straining his energies to purge the popular magazine and novel? A regular campaign against "*Schmutz und Schund*" has been going on in Berlin. And despite



United Artists.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN IN "THE CIRCUS."



Metro-Goldwyn.

LILLIAN GISH.

the volumes of praise bestowed on the intellectual drama from Sophocles to Stanislavsky, the public continues to prefer "Tons of Money" and "Abie's Irish Rose." The atmosphere in which poor-quality films flourish surrounds every other art-form.

The critic may express the anti-trash point of view personally and believe in it, but his arguments lose weight if he is writing in a newspaper which merely follows the course of least resistance. Every newspaper is a commercial undertaking (so is every theatre and cinema), and it prints news which it thinks will please the public. The curious thing is that the newspapers in every country which pander to the feeblest-minded intellects are the most unsparing in film-criticism. They fill one column with abuse of the film and other columns with the hero-worship of convicted criminals; the blatant investigation of a public man's private affairs—Chaplin's domestic troubles were a case in point; wilfully published photographs of modest people who are known to resent any kind of publicity; insignificant "stunts" worked up into grotesque and injurious elaborations of false "stories," which are given headline and poster publicity, and then corrected a couple of days later by a two-line paragraph in an obscure part of the paper—or not corrected at all; the preposterous nonsense of the feuilleton; the monstrous sentimentalism of the introspective, disturbing articles on marriage, love, children, and other similar subjects.

Many newspapers encourage the public to like rubbishy journalism, and it pays; but, unfortunately, there is no one to compel the newspaper proprietors to print a 10 per cent. quota of reliable news, because there is no one to work up the needful agitation, or give it a voice.

The newspapers, as a matter of fact, do less to raise

the tone of public opinion than the films, or, I should say, do more to lower it, for they print all the horrible facts of life, which depress and discourage the individual. Look at the headings in an average American or English newspaper any day, and note what it regards as good news. The film at least deals with the world of illusion, and is nine times out of ten strictly moral. The a-morality or immorality of a fact or a "story" is exactly what makes it "good copy" for a newspaper, and the excuse for recording it is its truth.

It has been said that English newspapers are much more severe on films than the American critics, who more often than not are content merely to chronicle facts concerning the pictures. The reason is not far to seek. Compare the amount of advertising matter inserted in a popular American paper by the film-people with the amount in one of our own papers. Here the film-public is not yet large enough to justify heavy advertisement, but I think we shall see changes in this direction before long.

I am not blaming newspapers puritanically. They have to show a profit, or they cannot carry on. Much more so is this the case with the film, which, by reason of the highly speculative nature of production, is a much more risky business than printing newspapers. The critic will say: "But the film-producer does not give the public what they really want. If the standard was raised the public would be larger." This is a fair argument, but it has to be proved. We can only depend on the lessons of the past for our instruction, and the film-producer has to give the public what earned dividends prove is wanted. It is no use pretending that the public taste in the mass has yet reached a high level.

The public taste improves only spasmodically.

Now and then circumstances arise which are hailed as signs of the times. People say: "Look at the Old Vic; how Shakespeare and opera appeal to the masses." But the Old Vic could not remain open without subsidies provided by public bodies, the L.C.C. and city charities.

If you are going to extend the demand for finer plays and films, you must alter the public. It is not the business of the cinema-owner to educate the youth and elevate the public's moral and intellectual standards. He exists only to make a living.

Some time ago an English schoolmaster obtained much publicity by exclaiming piously that he would not like to be a shareholder in Hollywood on the Day of Judgment. What on earth does this sort of remark mean? Why, it is the young folk, whom the schoolmaster is supposed to be educating, who enable the shareholders in Hollywood to receive handsome dividends. Hollywood only exists in answer to a public demand.

Does this schoolmaster imagine that the American bankers would lend huge sums of money to the film-producers to create something they could not sell? It has been said that the public get the play and film that they deserve. Sheer nonsense! They get the play and film that they *demand*—in an age devoted to the "Quest for Happiness." If they are wrongly brought up, you should blame, not the film-man, but their educational system.

What place in modern education does the cultivation of the artistic senses occupy? In the elementary schools, if Tommy appears once a week equipped with his thirty-five shilling violin in a nice, new, black-shining case, having incommoded everyone in the bus on his way and caused old gentlemen to damn the waste

of ratepayers' money, he is considered to have an artistic sense, no matter whether he has talent or not.

In the schools, where the firm foundation of all true education—Greek—is still laid, how often is it made a penance! How often is the one restful "English Literature" hour cancelled by incorrigible form masters in order to finish revising that infernal Greek syntax! No suggestion, you see, of Greek being the most vital language and expressing the most vital culture the world has known; in a word, of it being taught humanly.

What schoolmaster cares about culture, so long as he can ram his rubbishy ideas of education into the grinning numbskulls, whom fond parents have set dutifully at his feet? What schoolmaster is capable of teaching Appreciation with a capital A, how to tell the difference between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, living and existing, body and soul? How many schoolmasters today or in the past know what education means? Socrates, Plato, perhaps, and a few philosophers in every age, but few of them or of their successors have combined with their knowledge of life the faculty for imparting it to the young.

As long as education consists of cramming a lot of obvious, known, concrete facts into unreceptive heads, and omits to instruct in "the better part," under the mistaken impression that it partakes of the nature of a "pi-jaw," we shall continue to prefer the dross to the pure gold. When you are twenty-five it is soon enough to learn that 27 grains make a pennyweight troy, if indeed you ever want to know—and who's to stop you then consulting a crib? And even if you are going to be a milkman, there is no need to learn how many gills of milk and water go to a pint of cream while you are at school.

But if the milkman was taught Appreciation, almost from his mother's knee, of what our old Greek friend called τὸ εἶ ζῆν, of the difference between beauty and ugliness, he could not bear to see the purity of the milk's colour sullied by surreptitious additions of water. You can't separate life into compartments. A man enjoys the *News of the World* and "Getting Gertie's Garter," and hates what he calls "highbrow stuff," because he was never taught to appreciate anything properly. The schoolmaster is wasting his time by attacking the film alone; let him put his own house in order. He says the wrong men are making pictures. Are the right men imparting education in the right way?

Mr. St. John Ervine says that the legend should be written over most theatres today: "Abandon brains, all ye who enter here." But why should the theatres only be blamed, or the manager of the play? I dare say Mr. Ervine has stigmatised plays as stupid and banal which have been presented at the Queen's Theatre and the Gaiety Theatre. But let him be logical. The ground landlord of the Gaiety is the London County Council. The ground landlord of the Queen's is Christ's Hospital. Both these bodies have charge of the welfare of numerous children, who, owing to defective education, will grow up to enjoy the fearful trash which Mr. Ervine castigates at these theatres. Should not the money-making landlords also be blamed for the plays produced?

What a horrible revelation! Two bodies in charge of public instruction, drawing money annually from theatres which stage trash! But if the L.C.C. and Christ's Hospital reformed their education methods and taught Appreciation properly, they would have the satisfaction of knowing that there would be no need for

trashy entertainment to be given in their theatres, because the children would be growing up to ask for a finer, nobler form of amusement.

Under the present dispensation no one can expect that the public will want a more beautiful thing than musical comedy, and so the landlords are justified in taking the rent for the buildings. Nevertheless, let them not fulminate too loudly against "modern tendencies in the cinema and theatre"; they have certain responsibilities for present vogues themselves.

Economic facts are irrefutable. Alter the public taste, and the entertainment adapts itself. Entertainment does not create taste today; it is too commercial an undertaking. The film-man will make a picture based on a warehouse catalogue, or on "Problems in Electro-therapeutics," or on Gray's "Anatomy," if enough people will buy it. Educate children to appreciate good films, and they will not ask for bad. Even as things are today children like the best films best; they dislike the ugly, horrible films. It is only the gnarled, cruel adult mind that sees pleasure in gross, unpleasant subjects. The trouble is that the process of education is insufficient, that is all; the child mind is only partially stabilised by the education provided.

The cinema-owner pays huge sums of money yearly in rates for the education of children. Do you suppose he cares what pictures he shows, or how "advanced" they are? If education authorities performed their jobs properly, the public would demand better pictures and the exhibitor would supply them. The exhibitor is paying the schoolmaster to educate the children, and then the schoolmaster turns round and asks the exhibitor what he means by showing trash, which the children ought to have been taught to avoid. If the

schoolmaster persuades the Government to make the exhibitor show pictures which the public cannot be induced to patronise, the picture-theatres will possibly close down, and nothing would amuse me more than to see the Government or the schoolmasters trying to run picture-theatres. The sight would be worth filming as a comedy; or would it be a tragedy—for the ratepayers? Let the schoolmaster run his school properly first, and at least acquire the virtue of consistency.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WOMAN

WOMEN in the cinema must bear the responsibility to a large extent for the fare, good and bad, provided. It is for them that films generally are created, for they form the backbone of the audiences.

The present century has seen a great expansion of public entertainment, and the growth of the film has synchronised with the so-called emancipation of woman. Thirty years ago the music-hall was impossible for women, because men swilled beer, spat on the sawdust, and enjoyed the lurid humour of the red-nosed comedian.

Theatres were visited by women as a part of their social duties, and the young people were taken there as a treat. No woman pretended she went to the opera except to show off her clothes and meet people—object, matrimony. The cinema did not exist. Many women abstained from the theatre altogether during Lent, and half the theatres were shut for part of the summer while the “season” monopolised the quality’s attention. Women rarely went to the theatre alone; they were taken by strong, protecting men or occupied boxes *en famille*.

The last twenty years have seen almost all these customs disappear. If women can find men to pay for their stalls, they continue to go escorted to the theatre. But more frequently they go alone, because there are not enough men to take them all. In addition

to the theatres, they support more than 3,000 cinemas (18,000 in the United States; 3,800 in Germany; 2,500 in France, and so on). And they go regularly all the year round, for the observance of Lent has practically become obsolete. The main reason that they go more regularly to the cinema than to the theatre is that it is cheaper.

I often hear it said that, though theatre running costs have risen 100 per cent. since before the war, it is surprising that admission prices remain about the same. It is not surprising really, because theatres become more and more dependent on the woman patron, who has less money to spend than the man. The theatres dare not raise their prices—indeed, some talk of lowering their stall prices to 7s. 6d.—or they would drive their most numerous patrons into the cinema, where the price of a seat, except in a few West End houses, is dictated already by the women.

In New York the women are supreme, and except in special-run houses, the top price (3s.), despite the disparity in the value of money, is lower than in corresponding West End cinemas in London. These latter will undoubtedly reduce their most expensive seats (7s. 6d.) before long, because they cannot fill them. One or two have already done so, and no seat in the new Empire cinema in Leicester Square will cost more than 3s. or 3s. 6d.

Women are the "picture-fanatics," the "film-fans," the people who go week in week out to worship at the shrines of their celluloid heroes. A large proportion of the men in any cinema are there because they have had to pay for seats for their female companions. Others are there because it is dark and warm, and there is a more or less clammy hand to hold.

The average film is made for women to enjoy. It

deals with the primitive instincts—love, hate, envy, revenge—which are always more quickly aroused in woman than in man, and it is played in an atmosphere of smartness. Women are largely responsible for the smartness of the American film, the highly and not always artistically ornate setting, the pretty-pretty design. They demand the “baronial hall,” and the cabaret scene, and extravagance generally, because by nature they enjoy seeing money scattered about. Male critics are always condemning the wanton expenditure shown in American film-production, but they do not realise why it continues, and they do not study the psychology of the audience as the American production committees do.

As long as woman obtains a pleasurable sensation, she will pardon stupid films, banal films, impossible films. Technique, photography, acting conventions mean little to her. Primarily she demands a love-story in a smart setting with a happy ending, because she likes to imagine herself as the heroine. She always wants to wear fine clothes, and to be beautiful and admired; therefore, the heroine is always pretty and attractive, superbly gowned and coiffured (even in the Antarctic!). Woman always wants to marry; therefore, the heroine always falls on the hero's neck in the last hundred feet. She is always willing to love and be loved; therefore, 90 per cent. of films are love-stories. She considers sympathy and self-sacrifice, however selfish she is herself, to be predominant female virtues; therefore, 80 per cent. of films give the heroine such attributes, and very few heroines come to bad ends.

One thing only does the woman demand in the film—a moral conclusion—partly because it is usually more pleasurable than an unsatisfactory finish. Virtue and steadfastness rewarded and vice and crime punished;

not a new doctrine—in fact, just about as old as the world. But it suits woman, for she maintains her position in society by professed adhesion to the moral code, the Ten Commandments, and law and order.

Fundamentally, indeed, woman is as sound as she has ever been, but she cannot escape the craving for excitement which is the effect of her increased freedom. She does not deceive herself; if she enjoys a shocking play, or novel, or film, she does not pretend that it shocked her. She admits, at least to herself, that she enjoyed it, and looks out for another similar to it. It is well known that the so-called daring plays dealing with sex which appear from time to time in London are almost wholly supported by women. They think they will learn something new, and hope to satisfy their inquisitive minds.

I do not think the most strenuous defender of her sex will deny that woman has shed some of her prudery in the last few years. She can stand much freer conversation than she could. She can discuss things that raised a blush on her cheeks before the war. Many a young woman is actually prepared to listen to and recount a Rabelaisian story, particularly within the limits of a wholly female audience. If her opinion is sought, she no longer suppresses her views in deference either to God or man. The greater her mental development and the freer her self-expression, the more frequently does she exhibit her innate and essential coarseness, without which she could never face the normal functions of her sex.

The Victorians protected a naturally crude woman from herself and her acquaintances from her influence by an artificial veil of prudery, and in deference to the laws of society she suppressed her inclinations and

presented a mask of refinement to the world. Much of this refinement still persists, and many films today reflect this attitude towards life by larding the situations with false modesty. But there is a growing tendency in most films to keep up with woman's mental development. As long as the end is moral the means are justified, and inevitably there are scenes and situations which would not have been tolerated twenty years ago. Given a director of distinction, such a film is bearable. Badly produced, it is unspeakably vulgar.

The trouble at present is that we are passing through a state of transition, and the film-problem of the moment is, not that the growing freedom of expression should offend, but that the film-makers themselves may not be capable of evolving adequate treatments, or clever enough to cater for an increasingly sophisticated audience without gross suggestiveness.

The development towards freer expression has advanced much further in the theatre and the novel, and has progressed unchallenged because these media appeal to a much more eclectic public than the film. Numerous plays and novels—"The Captive" and "Jew Süß," for example—cannot be filmed today for fear of offending the censor, who exists to protect the simpler, less mature film-goer, and many a film is deprived of wholly inoffensive incidents lest the "hick" audience should be offended.

A really comic situation arose recently in Quebec, where the censors, disapproving of the illegitimate child in the American film based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous story, "The Scarlet Letter," insisted that Hester Prynne should be represented as a widow. It meant not a thing to them that the whole sense of the story was destroyed. Being (as an American paper put it) "dead from the neck up," the censors felt that

all they had to do was to carry out their job, regardless of everything.

I don't know how sophisticated Quebec audiences are, but I am quite willing to believe there are many people who might be offended by the story of an illegitimate child. The only remedy is to have pasteurised films shown in special theatres, and let freer expression find an opening in others. Wander through Hollywood, and you will meet directors who are crying out for more freedom and protesting that they cannot accomplish good work when they are so closely hemmed in by restrictions. They are reaching out to the ever-growing circle of cinema-goers who want entertainment "with a kick in it."

Your woman patron is responsible for the modern doctrine that the only crime in entertainment is dulness. Only a woman could openly express her disappointment with James Joyce's "Ulysses," because all the most secret things she had learned for herself about life were there set down in cold print, and had been set down long before she had ever dreamed of them. That is the kind of patron that the cinema will have to consider in the future. And she will ultimately drive off the screen all that spineless nonsense and meaningless gibberish which constitutes today about 50 per cent. of the programmes. It may be argued—better the rubbish than the suggestive, immoral film. Well, it may be a just reasoning, but the tendency at present is to despise the rubbish, and while there is no demand for immoral films (I am dealing with the situation as I see it), there is a demand for more sophisticated treatment.

The critics are almost invariably wrong when they are rash enough to prophesy about the appeal of any picture, because they do not look at the picture from

the viewpoint of the woman. The male critic spends his time condemning banality, lewdness, brutality, continuity, and technical errors. The woman who pays for her seat judges a picture solely from the pleasant effect it creates inside her. Hence, her love of the happy ending, her dislike of morbid, unnatural subjects, and her approval of the conventional love-story. Within those limits, let the film-maker be given his head, and don't let there be any dull patches.

CHAPTER XXIV

CHILDREN

THE influence of women on the film-maker is important, but the influence of the film-maker at present on less mature minds is greater. In western countries many picture-theatres derive much of their revenue from their children patrons, and in semi-civilised countries the steadily growing popularity of the film presents a serious problem to those responsible for their administration. I do not think that the latter problem is quite so serious as some would imagine.

The Governments of Dominions, Colonies, and dependencies should best know how to deal with the subject. Is anyone prepared to say that the Government of India believes that serious damage is being done to the relations between the native and the European by the film and yet does nothing to stop it? Either the danger is exaggerated or the Government is not doing its job properly. Nothing could be easier than for the Government of India to set up a mixed censorship, or a white censorship, and simply prohibit any risky pictures. A certain amount of dramatic licence must be allowed in films shown in European countries and in America. Otherwise you must cut out fiction of all kinds completely. It is absurd to say that, because it is unwise to show a picture in India and China, the picture ought not to be made. That is, in effect, what some of the patriotic organisations in this country do say. I imagine "White Cargo"

would be an extremely bad subject to film and present to an audience of West African natives. The play itself was heartily condemned by many people as an unfair description, and therefore unsuitable for performance in this country. But it probably did little harm. If the drama is to be so limited, we could not produce a play or show a film depicting, for example, a cowardly soldier or an unjust judge.

The subject of children in the cinema is more interesting. I have always believed that the only solution is special cinemas for children, or special performances in regular cinemas exclusively for children. The London County Council plan that no one below a certain age shall attend a cinema, where films that have not a "Universal" certificate are shown, unless accompanied by parent or guardian, is obviously unsatisfactory. The regulation is open to evasion, and demands numerous inspectors to carry it into effect. It seems unfair to deny to adults certain films because they are not suitable for children. That would be the effect of making all programmes suitable for a general audience.

One of the main difficulties in the way of special children's shows is the continuous performance principle. Most cinemas begin showing about 1.30, and give a non-stop succession of films until about eleven at night. Another difficulty is that special children's performances would not usually pay except at certain cinemas, or on Saturday afternoons and during holiday periods. Moreover, if a performance or a cinema is labelled "for children," the young folk avoid it.

Exhibitors ought to use more subtlety in this matter. There might be a "Boy's Own Programme" or the "Adventure Theatre," where such heroes as Douglas Fairbanks, Tom Mix, or Fred Thompson might fill



Paramount.

ERICH POMMER AND MISS POLA NEGRI,
Production manager and "star" of "Hotel Imperial"



Ufa.

EMIL JANNINGS AND MISS LYA DE PUTTI,
In "Vaudeville" ("Variety")

the bill. Exhibitors certainly have much to learn still about interesting the public.

The subject is of paramount importance, and is recognised as such by many educational authorities. All the experiments in all countries up to the present have failed, and the reason surely is that they have been tackled in the wrong way. You should not label a cinema "for adults only" unless you make it clear to the inquisitive child that he will be bored by the performance in it. There are many cinemas which show children's programmes occasionally, but generally speaking the system is inadequate.

Most experts will declare that the risk of young people being contaminated by the film is growing less instead of increasing. There are black sheep in every industry, producers who believe that pornography pays, and exhibitors who think, as one has said, that the only true bond of friendship is a taste for impropriety. But ask any capable man who seriously studies his business, and the answer will be that in the long run the suggestive film fails.

In reply to a comment on sex films made by the Bishop of Southwell, the *Daily Film Renter* (February 1, 1927) quotes Mr. Len Shaw, manager of the Sheffield Picture Palace, as declaring that people do not want sex films; that is proved by the box-office. He continues:

"Surely the Bishop will agree that 99 per cent. of the cinemas in 1927 are far more uplifting and wholesome than the one-time music-hall-cum-beerhouse. The atmosphere in Sheffield is miles ahead of those days, and we are progressing every day."

Producers always profit by lessons in making money given them by others. The biggest money-makers the screen has ever known are Harold Lloyd and Tom

Mix. And I am prepared to bet that these two men have never appeared in a suggestive scene. That, I imagine, is sufficient answer to the screen's strongest critics. From the moral standpoint Chaplin pictures tell the same story. "The Gold Rush" made immense sums of money. So did the early comedies, and they go on making money today, though they are now outmoded and archaic in technique. But Chaplin's sex film, "A Woman of Paris," was far less lucrative. It was not by any means, as some have stated, a financial failure. I believe it made about £100,000 profit altogether, but this compares poorly with the £120,000 which "The Gold Rush" took out of Great Britain alone. Chaplin had a big following among the children, and adults adored him because he could turn them into children again for a couple of hours. "A Woman of Paris" was a different matter. It alienated the very young and was too cynical for those who wanted to be rejuvenated. It remains, however, one of the cinematograph's triumphs of direction, technique, and timing.

I believe that public money would be extremely well spent in assisting the evolution of a children's cinema. Obviously, there is no more powerful educative force, and if anything is to be done to increase the children's appreciation of good entertainment, here surely is the place to start. The trade would be fully justified in seeking the help of public money. It has been applied to the development of the Old Vic and to school performances of Shakespeare. I would apply it to the exploitation of films, which urged, for example, the iniquity of war and the suppression of armaments.

The work should be done more or less in secret, for the surest way to preserve a theatre from public patronage is to label it as a propaganda palace. It is no fantastic

theory, for the League of Nations has considered it, and only lacks the resources to put it into effect. There ought to be room for a children's cinema in every large city. The measure of success it attains would encourage other towns to follow the lead, and it would not take long in this way to influence considerably production methods in humanitarian directions.

CHAPTER XXV

ART OR BUSINESS

AN inevitable limitation of the film is that it is as nearly as expensive to bring to the public as it is to make it. You can hang a painting in the National Gallery, lecture on it, talk about it, write articles about it, and gradually you can persuade English people to like it. You can sell it to America, and then they really appreciate it. But you can't follow that process with a film.

It is extremely expensive to popularise a good film, which does not instantly attract the public. A painting eats sweat and blood, and even money, but only while you are making it. So does a film, but the film continues to eat money and effort as long as it is in existence.

The result is that a film that is an art success and not an entertainment success can never be seen except by a small, eclectic public, and no one can afford to make pictures for an eclectic public—at least, not more than one. Many clever people have made that one good film, but no one in the world will or can afford to back him a second time. For the same reason, there are scarcely any amateur film-production societies to assist artistic development, as there are amateur dramatic and operatic societies.

The only way a man could hope to make films to please himself only would be to discover a Mæcenas to support him.

Almost every great painter, composer, or writer in the past has basked in the sunshine of a patron's smile.

Latterly the film was the obvious art to encourage; it was new and needed encouragement. But the critics, professional and otherwise, deliberately ran it down, declared it had no future, laughed at it, pronounced that there could be no art in mere photography, and forgot the artistic possibilities of dramatic composition, architecture, grouping, acting, design of form and line, without which no good film today is complete. The result was that they frightened the potential patron away from it.

But the business men, who invariably think more rapidly and more clearly than the critic, refused to be put off the film, and therefore it slid quickly out of the realm of art and became a matter of big business. The men of money said: "Let us make entertainment out of this new-found power, if the critics declare it is hopeless as art." Can anyone blame them? I don't. I say, more power to their elbow, because, at any rate, they saw something, even if it was only business, in the film. Every one of the big men in the film-business today started life in penurious circumstances: one was a trouser-presser, another kept a second-hand clothes shop, another was a clerk, a fourth was a bandsman. None of them secured any patronage, because the film possessed artistic possibilities. They were given money, because other men saw a chance of obtaining good financial returns on it.

Today, all the "advanced drama" people flock round the film as a medium of tremendous possibilities. They like to be seen at the Film Society's precious efforts or the Film Guild's shows in New York. The highest in the land, leaders of literature, politics, and art, slip into the cinemas now and again to see this and that picture. But I am afraid now that they are too late. They are hangers-on, not pioneers. Big business rules

the film, and the only consideration is: "Will it pay?" The critics' mournful cry is now: "No good can come of the film now, because the wrong men are running it." Well, someone had to run it. The men of taste pooh-poohed it, and the men of money embraced it.

The "wrong men" argument to me seems unutterably ludicrous. What do the critics expect the present owners to do? Hand the business over to them? Alter the methods so as to reduce the dividends? Frankly, I would rather the present state of affairs continued, and run the chance of individuality giving us a few good pictures a year, than cut the whole organisation to pieces in order to avoid the production of pot-boilers. I cannot see how any film-company can improve its pictures if it does not also produce pot-boilers to make the running. And in any case, only by comparison can an advance be made.

There is a wealthy man in America, who, they say, is perhaps the biggest shareholder in the film-business. It is due to him entirely that a most notable theatrical experiment has been made possible. It is very often the profits from the sale of the pot-boiler that enable the worth-while picture or play to be evolved. The sale of waste products is often the salvation of an industry.

Masterpieces will come to the screen, just as they come anywhere else—on the stage, in the printed word, on the canvas—by chance. You cannot organise art as you organise business. People who study the films note improvements every week, not merely in technical matters—there the advance in the last three or four years has been astonishing—but also in the treatment of values. In the picture of realism there is less false sentiment and more truth to life. In the picture of illusion there is more imagination in interpretation. Satisfaction may be derived often from

a film in which most of the values are wrong and the general impression hopelessly banal. A piece of acting, an architectural feature, new technical devices, the grouping of a few characters, a sub-title or two—such things have their value. The subject of a painting may repel, but the contemplation of the colour and brush work may be an unequalled æsthetic delight.

The film-producer at present is handicapped. The expenses are prohibitive, and all the big studios have to work at top speed to turn out the large number of pictures required for the world's markets. The film-problem is not merely one of quality, but, owing to the curious system of showing the pictures, also one of quantity. Every cinema in England requires at least 104 full-length pictures a year, and many require 208—four a week. In the future, devices may be found by which the cost of film-production may be lowered, and, more important, the quality of films may improve to such an extent that it will not be necessary to change the full programme twice a week.

The attempt is actually being made. Joseph Schenck, head of United Artists (the Chaplin-Fairbanks-Pickford-Barrymore, etc., group of producers), told me that it was the ambition of his firm to make not more than twenty films a year. The idea is that each shall run from two to three weeks at all but the "hick-town" cinemas, and some should run longer. So confident is Mr. Schenck in the wisdom of this plan that he is building or acquiring central new cinemas in all the principal towns in order to secure unfettered exploitation outlets for the films he is making.

I suggested to Mr. Schenck that the most attractive rôle he could play would be to become a patron of film-art—a Lorenzo de' Medicis on Santa Monica Boulevard. Why not? The film-folk have no right to

apply their profits to any other cause, such as building hotels or real-estate speculation, as long as the art of the film needs encouragement. Mr. Schenck has a way of looking at you with one eye half-closed. Well, who knows what he is thinking ?



Ufa.

MISS BRIGITTE HELM.
The rising German star.



Ufa.

WILLY FRITSCH.
In "The Waltz Dream."

CHAPTER XXVI

DO WE TAKE THE CINEMA TOO SERIOUSLY ?

Do we take the theatre and the film too seriously ? Live and let live as a principle in entertainment purveying has some ground for consideration, and the perpetual lament that the state of the theatre and the cinema is deplorable becomes wearisome. Every age has heard the same complaints, and there are several people in this country who would seriously like to see amusement reduced to a penance.

No doubt the Puritans in Queen Elizabeth's reign, who had their noses slit for their political and religious beliefs, bemoaned the elevation of Shakespeare to the position of a court dramatist, because he got Anne Hathaway into trouble before he wed her. And when he joked in loose strains to tickle the groundlings, how the good folk must have squirmed in their seats ! And it is doubtful if the Puritans of Athens enjoyed some of Aristophanes's humour compared with the staid drama of Sophocles. They sighed for the good old days, and said the Greek stage was going to the frogs.

I wonder if it is such a terrible calamity for the race that the quality of entertainment is not as intellectual as it might be ? Ought we to take the theatre and film seriously, or ought they to be just amusement ? I feel that the critics ought sometimes to pay for their plays and films. After all, willingness to pay for a thing is an important consideration. There are gloomy plays, which are recommended for their beauty and

their fine ideas and dialogue, which never earn a pound. It is an old and difficult problem. Would Mr. Critic pay 14s. 6d. to see his seventy-eighth Hamlet?

Half the joy of the 'cinema is its comfort. The Elizabethan theatre was not comfortable—you got wet if it rained—because the people were trained under a Stoic philosophy. The Greeks who exposed their children on Taygetus did not need an air-cushion on the backless stone seats of their theatres. But we need comfort as much as we need food. In a thousand years' time, when the circle has swung round, when petrol has dried up and speed has been reduced, when a great volcanic eruption has shattered this relentless civilisation of ours, when the only cinema show a woman wants will be the woad and tattoo on her husband's brawny arms, we may not require super picture-palaces and all the appurtenances of entertainment of 1927.

Till then let our plush tip-ups be soft and roomy. Let there be no draughts. Let the temperature be just right; let the music be often quite good and nearly always soothing. Let us smoke, and let the fumes be withdrawn magically by unseen forces in order not to fog the screen. Let the air be purified seven times in the retort. Let the café refresh us, and let the strong drink (which will doubtless reach the cinema before long) suffuse our souls, so that we shall forget the dramatic unities, the technical errors, the rules and regulations of art. Let us just enjoy ourselves and round off the spacious vestibule by erecting a statue to Epicurus. Perhaps that is the ideal state of affairs. Who knows? It has its charms, to be sure.

What of the films? Well, to some people they don't matter much. Mr. Stanley Le Sage, formerly manager of the Stoll Picture Theatre in Kingsway, used to tell me that for months an old gentleman came to the

theatre when the doors opened at 1.45 and bought a 9s. box. After a time it was always kept for him. He went to the box every day, sat on one chair and put his feet up on another, and slept blissfully for an hour and a half. He then tottered off back to his office close by, and signed his letters before going home. Only on rare occasions did he see as much of the films as the topical picture of current events.

It may be that the cinema is fulfilling its duty in providing a shelter from the damp and cold, a cheerful rendezvous, and an entertainment, at times soporific, at others mildly amusing or thrilling. The film takes the audience all over the world; it shows them surprising novelties; it introduces them to kings and heroes, to people who have hitherto been only printed names, to places and things otherwise inaccessible; it mingles laughter and tears in reasonable proportions. When a particularly stupid picture is screened, the audience can go away congratulating themselves that they are not as the folk they see in the film. If the public's favourite players are appearing in good stories, the joy is complete. Not a very intellectual feast, taken all round, but harmless and pleasant, supplying a public need, and, by providing an alternative to walking in the streets, reducing the risk of drunkenness and bad association.

We do not perhaps credit the film enough with supplying the entertainment needs of vast numbers of people, whose resources will not run to theatres. In our own spacious way we like to dilate on the joys of advanced drama, but there are millions of people in the world today who need the cinema. Let us be charitable at all costs. I wonder if we all appreciate the magic of the film? It is easy to take it for granted and forget it. But many people receive a tremendous thrill even

from a second-rate film. You remember how, when the film began, nervous members of the audience actually walked out, afraid of what was happening on the screen. There are many folk today who find it difficult to control their emotions in the cinema.

Imagine the effect of some exciting sequence on a mind that sees reality in every incident. The young woman who shouted from the gallery at the Elephant Theatre to the heroine about to be attacked by the villain, "Look aht, miss, 'e's behind the pianner," is reduced to a jelly by a Tom Mix's exploits or the chariot-driving of a Ramon Novarro. The simple mind, which despises the scented sins motivating the modern psychological play, reacts instantly to the universal themes—beauty in distress, villainy punished, mother-love ill-requited. It is the principles that matter; the detail is often disregarded.

I wish some of the less tolerant among us could sometimes visit the smaller cinemas and observe the magical effect of film-realism. The demand for something new is always being gratified, the element of surprise is continuous. At one moment you are in a sea-storm with John Barrymore searching for the White Whale; at another you are assisting in Beau Geste's grim defence of the Sahara fort. During the war the soldiers accepted Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece as familiar friends. They had become acquainted with the peculiarities of these countries on the pictures.

Nor is this the only attraction the film possesses. The movies are a drug which the audience absorbs. They sit in the darkness obsessed, overcome, almost stupefied. The screen radiates an amazing magnetic influence, which to many is irresistible. Hence the "film-fanatic" or "fan," who must go to the pictures, who is attracted by the rhythm, and fascinated by the

relentlessly unrolling panorama, which nothing he can do can stop.

He is detached from it; he is purely passive; he realises he has no control over the players, and that they do not react to his presence. All he might do to break the spell is to get up and walk out, and of that action he is physically incapable. The whole time he is taking in, taking in what the screen gives him. He contributes nothing to it. If he boos or hisses, the reel of celluloid will still continue to unroll at its even pace. In the theatre he must contribute something; he must afford his sympathy to the players, or they will become rattled and spoil the play. He must not shuffle his feet or fidget his chair.

But in the cinema he is not asked to supply anything. If every person leaves the building, the film will go on until 11 p.m. If hundreds of people clamour for admission, although every seat is taken, the picture cannot be adapted or changed. It will not vary a hair during the entire week. No amount of enthusiasm engendered will make the film any better or worse. It is a device of marvellous intricacy, like those models of machines in the South Kensington Museum. Just as you "watch the wheels go round" there, so do you watch a film passing across the screen. You are caught in its tiny sentimental and humorous cogs, and your brain goes round and round in sympathy and in tune with the sprocketed little drum which jerks the film through the projector. You surrender yourself absolutely to its influence.

For this reason you rarely want to see the same film twice, unless there are numerous technical devices employed which escape you the first time, and that is why the cinema programme changes so rapidly. There are only a few films which support a long run. And

that merely makes you a more determined "fan." You must go regularly once or twice a week.

You will find children completely enthralled by the serial. You know how the van-boy pores over the villainously printed penny dreadful; you see him straining his eager eyes enthralled by the hero's exploits. This state of mind is accentuated a hundred times by the film-serial. A couple of thousand feet are shown each week, and every instalment finishes at the apex of excitement. (Incidentally, one never hears a word of complaint from education authorities against the badly printed serial, which is much more injurious to the eyes by reason of its small type than the film, which they so roundly blame for eye-strain.)

The film is attractive because it is easy-going. There is no ceremony about going to the pictures. You can be an enthusiast and arrive in time for the big picture just as if you were going to a play, or you can be lackadaisical and drop in any time between one and eleven. You needn't dress; you can eat either before or after the show. If you arrive within the last reel of the main film, you can fold your hands and have a sleep and awaken in time to see it begin again.

If you go to a play and miss the first act, you are undone. You can't see it unless you pay again another night. But at the cinema, unless you arrive very late in the evening, you can wait on after the picture is over and see its opening sequences without extra payment.

The method of film-showing is not perfect yet by any means. There are numerous changes I would advocate. Occasionally, for example, during the action the names of the picture and of the players ought to be repeated. It is impossible to carry in your head the long cast which precedes the action, and if you are a couple of minutes late you never get to know who they

are at all. Obviously, you can't strike a lot of matches in the dark and study the programme. It might be a good idea to hang a large illuminated programme showing title of picture and names of players near the screen for reference or picture-theatres might adopt the idea used at the Festival Theatre at Cambridge of printing the cast on talc, which is held up to the light (of the screen in the cinema) and easily read.

But this is a digression. To return—the public only ask for value for money. They do not ask to be instructed, only to be amused, and students of the screen must join the Film Society. I think that is a fair description of the average film-goer's attitude. I was sitting in the Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles one night, and a natural-history film was being shown of a fish which adheres by suction to a board. "Why, it isn't real; it's a fake," said the disgusted voice of a girl behind me. The picture simply bored her.

To her reality was contained in the picture that followed. The suction fish was slightly revolting; it evoked a sense of sympathy in her; she had to contribute something, and for that she was not in the mood. But when she began to absorb the adventures of Nellie, the beautiful "stenographer" who spurned the advances of her wealthy employer, though he offered her an "apartment" and a "roadster," in which she could give airings to her old mother and ailing cripple brother, in order to keep herself unspotted for the penurious but rising young architect—then our film-devotee's joy was full. She began to revel, and continued revelling until the last foot of the last reel had slid through the projector.

CHAPTER XXVII

“CARPE DIEM!”

“CARPE DIEM—Seize the day!” Lay hold of the new forms of self-expression! Enjoy them! Don’t worry! Let your imagination riot! If you want them, take them! They are yours for the asking, and don’t be put off by Jeremiahs, who tell you to cling to the old-established traditions, in preference to embarking on uncharted waters. The only fun in life is discovery. The only object of the past is to urge you on to fresh experiments in the future. This is the most brilliant age the world has ever known. Every age is more brilliant than the last. Optimism every time. If your educational system fails, scrap it! Don’t allow yourself to be limited. That is the only sin.

Would you maintain that the sight of 10,000,000 people in Great Britain, working hard for nine or ten hours a day and taking flight in the cinema into new, hitherto unknown pleasures for two, is less elevating than the sight of 5,000,000 men, women, and children working in underground coal-mines fourteen hours a day, while 5,000 enjoy the fine arts on the surface, for as many hours as they can drag themselves from their silken beds? If you would maintain that, you will inscribe happily to the doctrine that the Early Victorians had a better idea of living than we have.

Recently I heard Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, who declared himself an Early Victorian, deploring “the present-day cult of the ugly.” Fancy an Early



Paramount

ERICH VON STROHEIM.

In "The Wedding March."



Paramount

ADOLPHE MENJOU.

Victorian imagining today's cults are uglier than his ! Hurrah for the tartan *décor* of Balmoral ! Well, well, how we do swallow the insults of those who live in the past ! Let us strike a blow for ourselves ! What anæmic musical substitutes of the past would they present for our satisfaction in preference to our own tense, thrilling, modern rhythms, that stimulate our very souls ? We react to our modern music as they, poor decorous souls, would never have dared to do to theirs.

Do not pay the slightest attention to Sir Thomas Beecham when he says the state of music in England is worse than it has ever been in the history of the country ! Millions more people have been brought into touch with the great masters of the past within the last five years than he could possibly hope to reach in a hundred years. And with this fact staring our musicians in the face, is there to be found one who will seriously apply himself to the perfecting of the wireless amplifier ?

Sir Thomas says there are only 150,000 “ music ” lovers in Great Britain, and he is seriously perturbed about their welfare ; 150,000, when there are 40,000,000 souls waiting for musical education, which they can understand. Does it ever dawn on such as he that we are living in the twentieth century, the requirements of which are entirely different from those of any past age ? Art standards are eternal. Are they ? I wonder. It does me good to hear of Mr. Bernard Shaw's devotion to the film. He recognises the imperative necessity for the world of new forms of expression.

The film is the greatest new form we are likely to see in our time ; I see fresh developments in it every time I go into a cinema. I am disappointed over and over again, but I am not so badly disappointed as Sir Thomas Beecham is with music. The film increases in power and develops in stature continually. Accord-

ing to Sir Thomas, orchestral playing, singing, and opera performance gets worse and worse every year. "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away."

Why does the orchestral playing of today fail? Partly because the music ordered to be played is treated as a deified mode, while all the time it is not expressing modern feelings. Let it be played as a prelude to modern music of all kinds. Let us study the modes leading up to modern expression by all means. Why not admit that times, opinions, and tastes change? Why go on drumming Wagner into the ears of people who show no reaction? Why not give him a rest? Why build up a tradition that people ought to like something, which by no stretch of imagination can appeal to them? Let nothing that is past and over be allowed to frustrate or delay the developments of the present!

Similarly in the theatre. The plays of the past are given for our learning, not for our devotional admiration. We must not worship sheepskin and manuscript and the still-burning fire, which is revealed when we read the words of the dead. Why all this talk of holding a mirror up to nature, when many of our teachers are too anxious to hold it up to the nature of 500 years ago? We are not worse intellectually, physically, or morally, because nine-tenths of the world's greatest literature, art, and drama have been lost irretrievably, and only one-tenth has come down to us.

The living human being would go on creating, if all the books in the world, if everything in written form were piled together in Hyde Park and solemnly burned. Egypt was no poorer because Cleopatra dissolved her costliest pearl in a selfish drink. Nature abhors a vacuum, and the human mind keeps on repairing and recreating.

Why this devoted worship of the past ? It cramps and hinders our development, because the young are always being frightened by the jealous contempt of their elders. The young playwright in England today can hardly manage to live, let alone have his play produced. Nevertheless, a solemn society exists in London in 1927 to popularise the pornographic drama of the Restoration and the lewd, half-baked plays of the pre-Shakespeare period. If we want to be lewd, why not let us be lewd in a modern style ? The play-censor permits Restoration lewdness and refuses to license modern lewdness. What a farce ! Why is an idea any less revolting because it is 300 years old ? And that is what we are told is fine art. The censor would be much better employed by forbidding people to spend money on the resurrection of dead, fusty ideas, and encourage them to help the modern writer to emerge.

Are you surprised that the public will not go to Shakespeare today ? I am not, in the least. I would much rather endeavour to assist the evolution of the film than deplore the indifference of the public to Shakespeare. You aren't allowed to alter Shakespeare—he is one of the demi-gods—although the style of his plays means nothing to the modern mind. Yet, had Shakespeare lived today he would probably have written “ Macbeth ” as a film, because not enough modern players are made of the stuff that stirs us, and because the theatre stage cramps the style of the play.

Many people contend that the film “ Peter Pan,” as shown here, is more satisfying than the play on the stage, where you can see all the wires. Obviously the film is capable of greater possibilities, if only because every incident has not, as on the stage, to be attached to its neighbours by words. Imagine how much less

satisfactory "Beau Geste" would have been on the stage. Recall the absurdities of modified and adapted productions of Greek plays at Covent Garden and elsewhere with chorus running up and down the gangways in the auditorium. The film has much to learn yet, but it is a willing pupil.

Let us be frank. The public will not go to Shakespeare as a rule. Miss Sybil Thorndike made money with "Henry VIII.," but she lost a pocketful over "Macbeth." Dramatically, of course, much of Shakespeare is, as George III. very rightly said, "sad stuff." It is outmoded. The episodic treatment no longer appeals on the stage; as a mode it has been stolen and developed by the film, while in spectacle today the stage cannot compete with the screen.

In most of Shakespeare's historical plays the atmosphere is offensive to young people today. All the motives of the wars, personal quarrels of fifth-rate monarchs, which involve the slaughter of thousands of harmless subjects, are preposterous. Read carefully the speech of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the opening scene of "Henry V." What remains of "Henry V." for the modern audience? They can read the poetry with pleasure in the school and the study, and they can put the action on the screen with superb effect.

I know film-men take a long time to make up their minds on their subjects, but they have this excuse, that the film is so young and underdeveloped, that they are taking much greater risks. And they take greater risks than their theatrical brothers. If they waited to see someone else tackle a subject before they tackled it themselves, the film would be bankrupt by next Tuesday. There would be no possibility of artistic or commercial advance. Every film-man would be waiting to see what

his rival was going to do. The advantage of being highly commercialised is that you must go on or crack up.

You are bound to see advances on the films, because it is alive, and a live thing must grow. Is there any more stimulating piece of stage-craft than the chariot-race in “ Ben Hur ”? Would you ask for a more tense and imaginative piece of acting than Noah Beery’s as Sergeant Lejaune in “ Beau Geste.” I admit willingly that the Biblical scenes in the former are unsatisfactory, and that the Sahara fort in the latter is a cardboard affair like a toy given you at Christmas years ago, for there is no perfection yet on the screen. If it were perfect its day would be over, and we should be already looking for something new.

I did not desire at the moment that I saw the climax to the first half of “ The Big Parade ”—when the girl was left behind as the lorries of soldiers moved up to the front line—to imagine a more inspiring example of cumulative effect. I had never seen so terrific an example of the meaning of the eternal triangle till I saw the young acrobat in “ Vaudeville ” (“ Variety”) stealing the girl from “ The Boss.” I don’t think I had ever noticed so high a polish on farcical acting as in “ Evening Clothes,” when Adolphe Menjou, without a shilling in his pocket, sat down at the restaurant table and listened in agony to his companion ordering an extravagant meal.

For contrasted poignancy and laughter-compelling humour give me “ The Gold Rush.” The first entrance of Chaplin, followed by the bear, would alone have carried the film 2,000 feet. For smooth technique Lubitsch’s “ So this is Paris ” has been seldom approached. By its stark, desperate realism, imaginative conception, and precise execution, “ The Cruiser *Potemkin* ” holds the spectator enthralled.

And instead of these vigorous modes, which are in perfect tune with the spirit of the present day, the public are urged to find pleasure in the morbid, introspective philosophy of dead Russians, who argued fiercely against the conditions of society forty years ago, or in the poetic drama of the ecstatic back-to-nature school, who want to pick up daisies and pick down stars, and have no sympathy with modern aspirations.

Why look back? Progress is the only thing that matters. Here in the film and the wireless, and in a few years' time in television, you have tremendous modes of self-expression waiting to be exploited. Why, listen to the pessimists of the past generation, who say "Ah! but you never saw Irving or Duse"? But that is because they are looking back, and the outline is blurred. Their heroes are veiled in a soft lustre, and they forget the numerous defects and weaknesses. You can't see Irving or Bernhardt. So why lament and blame the modern for wanting something else or wanting to find or make something better?

Every artistic triumph of the past slips into its rightful position in the scheme of history. It is perfectly easy to sit down and contemplate the beauties of the past, especially when they gain the venerability of antiquity. The hard thing, the thing worth doing, is to discover the beauties that are being continually evolved round us. Let us discover our own standards. Let us study the new modes as they evolve themselves, and work upon them until we achieve the finest results possible. Let us fight to express ourselves in our own way, not merely with a harpsichord or a virginal, a sackbut, psaltery, or dulcimer; not even by painting, sculpture, dancing, or stage-playing; unless we can add something to what has already been achieved. Mere slavish imitation and vain repetitions can be left to

the non-creative mind. Whatever new channel we may find to lead us to a more lucid, more purposeful, more significant expression of our ego, let us explore. Let us launch out into the deep future, and let down our nets for a draught of inspiration, relying more on the illimitable creative genius of the living human brain, and less on the unexpanding accomplishments of the dead. However beautiful and splendid they may have been once, they contain none of the glorious uncertainty of development which is possible, when live brains and live bodies are working to achieve something new.

The film has won consideration and respect slowly. A dozen years ago no reputable actor would be seen on it, or, if he did appear, he used a different name. Now you can scarcely keep the best actors in every country out of the studio. Gradually, it is beginning to be perceived that men of the highest intelligence can use the film as a means of expressing themselves. The tremendous technical advance made in the last two or three years is alone capable of attracting intelligent attention. Continually, one hears of scientists anxious to express their theories of life by means of a film-story.

I claim little for the film at the moment, and I know that, like any other mode of expression, the work done will consist ultimately of pot-boiling and art, the former predominating, for many folk require simple amusement. Compare painting, drawing, music, the drama. But I claim that, when some of the new processes are developed, the film will provide a vehicle for genius of unparalleled power and value. Meanwhile, let us drive it forward and not be discouraged by occasional setbacks. We need seriously today a potent method of representing what we feel and mean. The other modes are so tightly bound by conventions.

You see, there is here a terrific power, a live force,

like electricity. Bridle it, handle it, use it, enjoy it, whatever you like, but, for goodness' sake, don't disregard it. Just think of 250,000,000 people in the world going to the movies, enjoying the movies, being "menaced" by the movies, every week of their lives. How can you alter the process by jabbering about dramatic unities and standards, and Shakespeare and Tchechov? You must accept the state of affairs as a natural development and seek to speed it onward, and be glad of a new field of research. The film is truly representative of modern life—its movement, rapid change of scene, speed, sharpness of detail, plain straightforward expression; we have little idea what it holds in store for us. Don't let us miss the chance of finding out. "Carpe diem!"

It is a great pity that the opponent of the film almost always judges it after dropping into a cinema by chance. A man would not judge pictures or plays or music in that haphazard style. There are thousands of awful films, and there are thousands of awful plays and pictures. What we should judge the film by is its aspirations and the best examples of its art. It is the one good film in a hundred, and not the ninety-and-nine pot-boilers, that is worth attention and encouragement.

Step back and examine some other recent films. The screen has made steady progress, despite its commercialisation, in 1926. "The Wrath of the Gods," "Hotel Imperial," "The Scarlet Letter," "Resurrection," parts of "The Black Pirate," "The Atone-ment of Gösta Berling," "Hindle Wakes"—these are a few, by no means a complete list, in which the values are right, the realism is true, and the treatment is sincere. That improvement is going to be maintained.

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